

# Advancing South-South Cooperation: India's Development Partnerships with Pacific Island Countries



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ADVANCING SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION:  
India's Development Partnerships with Pacific Island Countries

By Dinoj K. Upadhyay, Vinod Kumar, and Aditi Gupta

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## Foreword

The Asia Foundation promotes international cooperation across Asia and within regions to enable government and non-governmental leaders to share lessons and best practices related to governance and common developmental issues. The Foundation's programs and initiatives seek to strengthen relations among Asian nations in the efforts to foster peace, stability, prosperity, and effective governance. Given India's increasing and active engagement in the Pacific Islands region, the Foundation collaborated with Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) to undertake exploratory research to improve understanding of the various ways in which India is extending assistance in the forms of technical assistance, capacity building programs, knowledge sharing, production cooperation, or technology transfer.

The current research on - Advancing South-South Cooperation: A Case Study of India's Development Assistance in the Pacific Islands Region, is in line with the growing dialogue on the importance of south-south cooperation (SSC), which has emerged as a positive way for the economies of the global south to lead the conversation on cooperative development and strengthening of the south-based economies. India is the world's largest democracy and a growing economic power. Given India's geopolitical importance in the Indo-Pacific region, it is important to examine how India's south-south cooperation will play out in the Pacific Islands and to explore opportunities to enhance India's engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

We are pleased to present the finding of the research to a global audience. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General, RIS, for his overall guidance and inputs to the research. Thanks to the research team led by Dinoj K Upadhyay with expert advice from Ambassador Vinod Kumar and Aditi Gupta for their commendable effort. I would also like to thank Ms. Anthea Mulakala, Senior Director of International Development Cooperation, The Asia Foundation, for her technical oversight and guidance to the research. Lastly, thanks to the stellar editorial team led by Suzan Nolan from BlueSky International, her associate Laura Pierson, and The Asia Foundation's research assistants, Calista Chong and Niki Graziella Baroy.

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We hope that the research paper will provide valuable insights to development practitioners, policymakers, academics, and other interested stakeholders in defining their strategic development assistance and investments in the Indo- Pacific region.

Nandita Baruah

Country Representative – India

The Asia Foundation

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Affairs, and served as Additional Secretary (International Organisations) dealing with UN, counter-terrorism, and cybersecurity.



## Introduction

The Pacific Islands comprise a vast oceanic region of coral atolls and volcanic islands that are home to the world's largest concentration of microstates. Some islands in the region are fully independent countries; others have a compact of free association (COFA) with a larger country, and some are constituent territories of larger countries. Among the Pacific Island countries, 12 sovereign states belong to the United Nations (UN): the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Republic of Fiji, Republic of Kiribati (a COFA with the United States [US]), Republic of the Marshall Islands (a COFA with the US), Republic of Nauru, Republic of Palau (a COFA with the US), Independent State of Papua New Guinea (PNG), Independent State of Samoa, Solomon Islands, Kingdom of Tonga, Tuvalu, and the Republic of Vanuatu. The Pacific Islands also include two non-UN member states, the Cook Islands and Niue, which freely associate with New Zealand, and the non-sovereign states of American Samoa (US), Northern Mariana Islands (US), Territory of Guam (US), French Polynesia (a collectivity of France), and New Caledonia (a collectivity of France). Geographically, the Pacific Islands region comprises three sub-regions: Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia.

For decades, Australia, New Zealand, France, the US, and, to a lesser degree, the United Kingdom and Japan have viewed the Pacific Islands as their common sphere of influence and interest. The Pacific Islands were relegated to the periphery of global security considerations after World War II. Since then, the Pacific Islands have faced cycles of attention, neglect, ambiguity, and pressure. While the region has always received considerable attention in relation to the climate crisis and climate change impacts, the Pacific Islands have recently assumed heightened global prominence in the wake of growing Chinese engagement, aid, and influence in the region and the increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific region.

India has also grown its engagement and assistance to the region, particularly with Fiji and PNG in the sub-region of Melanesia.<sup>1</sup> Historically linked through diaspora and the Commonwealth of Nations, India has diversified trade and aid relationships with 11 Pacific Island Commonwealth members: trade partners New Zealand and Australia, the latter also a development partner, and nine other Commonwealth-member countries have been trade and/or development partners: Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, PNG, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. India has also engaged in South-South cooperation and trade with sovereign non-Commonwealth-member islands, including the Marshall Islands and

Palau. Collectively, this paper identifies these 14 sovereign Pacific Island states, not including Australia or New Zealand, as the “PICs.”

Since its initial cooperation initiatives with newly independent Nauru, Tonga, and Samoa in the 1970s, and Fiji and PNG in 1971 and 1999, respectively, the Government of India (GoI) has multiplied bilateral cooperation initiatives with PICs, increasing its political interactions and concessional loans and grants, particularly for infrastructure, and, technological, digital, and health assistance. India also intensified tri- and multilateral cooperation regionally and with large donor countries. Additionally, many Indian businesses and civil society organizations (CSOs) have facilitated mutually beneficial trade and sustainable development partnerships with PICs. India’s partnerships with PICs prioritize cooperation, including capacity building, education, health, sustainable development, renewable energy, agriculture, climate change, disaster risk reduction, space technology applications, and information technology.

However, PICs have pushed back against one-size-fits-all globalization. PICs prefer intra-regional trade and targeted markets that optimize PIC goods and experiences. They also prize their relatively new independence and commitment to democracy, peace, and regional security. With its focus on “mutual benefit,” India’s approach to cooperation may be particularly well-suited to increased bi-, tri- and multilateral development partnerships with the PICs, especially since India focuses on projects that align with PICs’ goals and values. The region offers development opportunities in the areas of the blue economy, particularly fisheries, tourism, and other sectors such as film shooting, food processing, mining, and private healthcare. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure maritime trade routes within the region because many PICs have large exclusive economic zones (EEZs),<sup>2</sup> areas of the sea under the territorial ownership of a single country guaranteed by UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)<sup>3</sup> that offer several avenues for economic cooperation and increased trade.

India’s development and trade partnerships have been especially strong with Fiji and PNG. In Fiji, India has long focused on the sugar sector, healthcare, education, and capacity building, and more recently, on renewable energy, information technology (IT), and the small-business (SME) sector. PNG is a resource-rich country, and India’s initiatives in the country have centred on securing energy supplies from PNG’s untapped resources, especially its liquid natural gas. In recent years, India has worked to develop a partnership with all PICs. India offers development programs to 14 countries through the Forum for India-Pacific Islands

Cooperation (FIPIC),<sup>4</sup> a multinational group developed in 2014 for cooperation between India and the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, FSM, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Palau, PNG, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. India also offers development assistance through United Nations (UN) Partnership Dialogues with the 12 Pacific Small Islands Developing States (PSIDS)<sup>5</sup>: Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, FSM, Nauru, Palau, PNG, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.<sup>6</sup>

The scope and content of India's development partnerships depend on each individual country's size, requirements, and resources. Indian cooperation has primarily focused on large island countries in the Melanesian subregion, with fewer development projects in Micronesia and in Polynesia. Scholars argue that India should look beyond Suva, and Port Moresby,<sup>7</sup> observing that "Melanesia [the subregion] does serve as a kind of gateway between the deeper Pacific and the wider world. Despite Melanesia's relative wealth and higher capacity to participate in the international community, it can be argued that India should also pursue more relationships in the Pacific, in the interest of developing relations with equally important, but more neglected corners of the ocean."<sup>8</sup>In fact, India and some smaller PICs have made efforts to expand development partnerships and political interactions. These efforts are still in early days, and there is substantial scope for enhanced developmental cooperation between India and island states in Micronesia and Polynesia.

### ***Research Methodology***

The findings in this paper are based on extensive research and interviews that took place from April 2018 to April 2021. Literature review included government agreements, policy papers, research reports, research papers, books, trade data, and relevant economic indicators, as cited in this paper. The research team interviewed academicians, policymakers, development practitioners, and members of the business, civil society, and diplomatic communities in both India and the PICs in-person and via email. Interviewees from CSOs included Shri Satish Mehta, the honorary director of international operations for Bhagwan Mahaveer Vikalng Sahayata Samiti (also known as the Jaipur Foot Organization) and Meagan Fallone, a board director and former chief executive of Barefoot College International; private sector interviewees included Dr. Harinder Sidhu, the vice president of corporate development for Apollo Hospitals Group (see Box 2) and representatives from Indian business and trade associations, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII); and Indian government representatives included

Vishvas Sapkal, the joint secretary and former high commissioner of India to Fiji, and Vinod Kumar, a former Indian diplomat who served as the head of multilateral economic relations division and high commissioner to Fiji.

### ***Structure of the Paper***

The paper is divided into seven parts. The first part provides a geographical, societal, and economic introduction to the PICs, explaining how the region is split into three sub-regions: Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. The second section details India's approach to development cooperation with partner countries and addresses barriers within India's development partnerships. The third section outlines the history of India's development cooperation in the PICs, categorised according to India's interactions with each sub-region. The fourth section elaborates on India's development partnerships in the PICs, divided first into the sub-regions of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, and second into sectors, including financial assistance, digital cooperation, people-to-people contacts, disaster relief, health services, and capacity building. The fifth section lists trade and investment linkages, such as bilateral imports and exports, and how the private sector can invest in future enterprises. The sixth section dives into India's current and potential trilateral development partnerships with the US, Australia, European and Asian countries, and multilateral organizations. In its conclusion, the paper offers policy recommendations for bilateral and multilateral areas of political, economic, cultural, and technical cooperation. It also includes prospects for triangular cooperation and provides a scope for future research on building sustainable development partnerships with PICs.

### **The Pacific Island Countries: Geography, Society, and Economy**

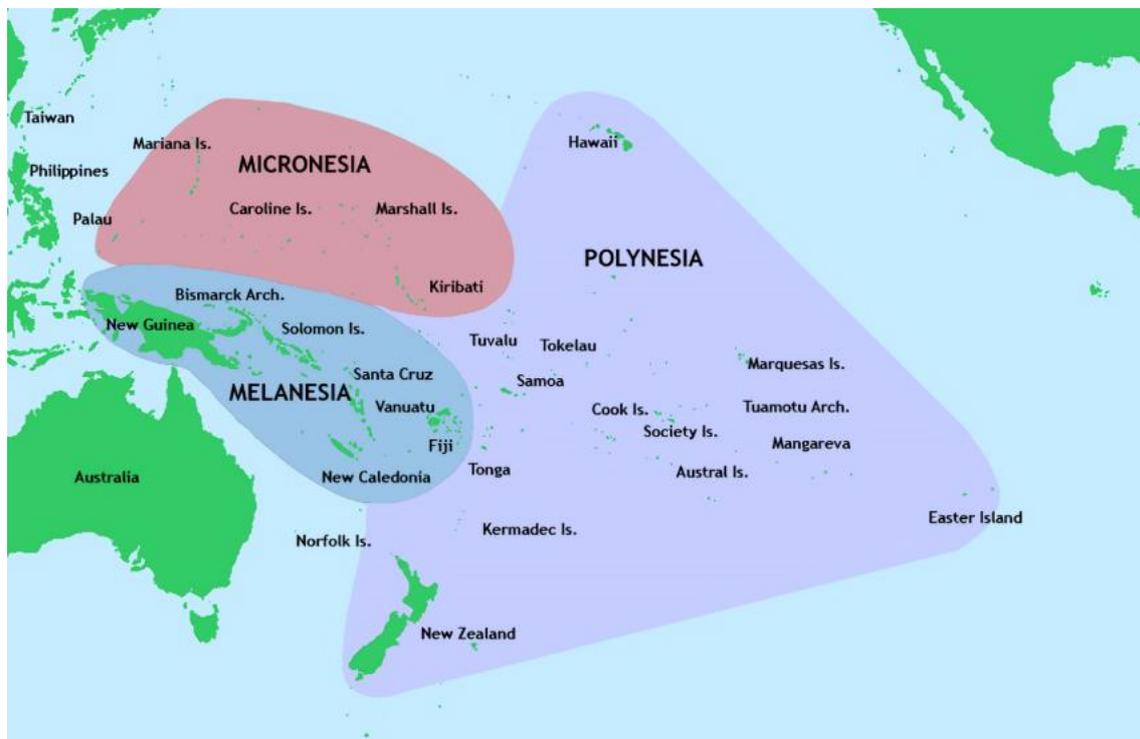
Situated in the Pacific Ocean and spanning Asia to the Americas, the Pacific Islands contain a common geographic yet diverse cultural landscape. The Pacific Islands are divided into three geographic groupings: Melanesia (PNG, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu); Polynesia (Tonga, Samoa, Tuvalu); and Micronesia (Palau, the Marshall Islands, FSM, Nauru, and Kiribati). Micronesian countries consist of more than 2000 small islands and atolls; most, composed of coral, often measure approximately two square kilometres. Traditional indigenous ways of life are expressed through outstanding cultural landscapes and seascapes, settlements, and monuments, and through multiple traditions, knowledge, stories, song, music, and dance.<sup>9</sup> A study from the International Council on Monuments and Sites

(ICOMOS) explains, “This heritage reflects the common origin and interaction of many Pacific Island societies and the distinct ways of life that have developed in each archipelago. Pacific Island societies include the linguistically diverse communities of Melanesia, those of Polynesia where histories tell of a single homeland, and the Micronesians, some of the world’s most isolated communities that attest to the great navigational and seafaring skills of their ancestors.”<sup>10</sup>

Pacific Island countries have diverse sizes, populations, and economies. Papua New Guinea and Fiji, in terms of size and population, are small in a global context, but are some of the largest in the PICs. Kiribati’s 33 atolls, with an area of about 800 kms<sup>2</sup>, are spread over 3.5 million kms<sup>2</sup> of ocean and span all four hemispheres of the Earth. Due to their small land size and geographical location, the PICs face serious economic limitations, scattered populations, and limited resources. PNG (with 7.6 million inhabitants), Fiji (850,000), and the Solomon Islands (611,500) account for approximately 90 percent of the PIC population; five countries – the Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, and Tuvalu – have populations less than 20,000. Industrialization remains minimal and domestic economies of scale impossible to achieve.

Nonetheless, the PICs have made more than their fair contribution in maintaining global peace and security and have greatly influenced the global development discourse. For example, the PICs fought for the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Rarotonga) and negotiated and advocated for what became the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.<sup>11</sup> Fiji, a major contributor to UN Peacekeeping missions, has chaired important international bodies and negotiations. In terms of economic development, Fiji Water is among the global best-selling premium water brands.<sup>12</sup> PICs have also taken the lead in global climate change advocacy. For instance, Fiji Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama was appointed President of the UN Climate Conference COP23.<sup>13</sup> With President of COP 24 Michał Kurtyka, Bainimarama issued the Talanoa Call for Action which highlights the exigency of the climate crisis.<sup>14</sup>

### Map 1: The three major cultural areas in the Pacific Ocean: Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia



Source: Howe (2008)<sup>15</sup>

High transportation and raw material costs also make entrepreneurship difficult to sustain, and many islanders survive at subsistence levels with a social safety net of family, clan, and community ties.<sup>16</sup> The island states smaller than PNG and Fiji do not have easy access to markets nearby. These countries, like their larger counterparts, remain vulnerable to natural disasters and cyclones.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, small island economies also face severe shortages of professional and technical skills and paucity of domestic savings, making them vulnerable to external shocks. About 13 percent of the small Pacific Island countries' population is either unemployed or underemployed, prompting them to seek work in Australia, New Zealand, the US, and other countries; remittances from migrant workers form a crucial part of the countries' GDP.<sup>18</sup>

In the Pacific Island region, the number of Internet users and mobile subscribers has grown, but broadband or mobile data access in most countries reaches fewer than the global average of 50 percent.<sup>19</sup> Fiji is an exception; Internet access reached 50 percent of the population in 2018, and mobile-cellular subscriptions per 100 inhabitants exceeded 117 in 2018.<sup>20</sup> In the Marshall Islands, over 38 percent of individuals used the Internet in 2017, but only 27 per 100 inhabitants had a mobile-cellular subscription. However, in PNG, only 11 percent of the

population used the Internet in 2017, but 47 per 100 inhabitants had mobile-cellular subscriptions.<sup>21</sup>

The PICs have made substantial progress in primary education since 2000. Progress has also been seen in life skills and continuous learning, and more students are participating in secondary education and other forms of higher education.<sup>22</sup> The PICs have also made progress in adult literacy, with most countries ranking above the world average; only PNG lags behind.<sup>23</sup> However, the quality of education is a concern, and there are general skill shortages in many PICs. The lack of quality technical and vocational education and training, lack of links between labour market demand and training, low workforce skills in communication and information technology, and shortcomings in generic workplace skills and entrepreneurial skills are main challenges in the PICs.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had severe implications on economic activities in the PICs, including the weakening of vital economic links, such as the loss of tourism, disruptions to international trade, and a some fluctuation in remittances. An International Monetary Fund (IMF) study notes that the COVID-19 pandemic may be more harmful for these countries than some of the worst cyclones from years before.<sup>25</sup> The pandemic, coupled with ongoing disaster events, undermines the short- and long-term resilience of many countries in the region.

### **India's Approach to Development Cooperation in the Pacific Islands**

People of Indian origin comprise a considerable proportion of the PICs' populations. However, the region did not figure prominently in initial period of India's foreign policy. Later, New Delhi took policy initiatives to widen relations and expand the development cooperation. Their relationship has been further energized in the broader ecosystem of Look East policy and later Act East policy.<sup>26</sup> Launched in 1991, the Look East Policy aimed to develop political contacts, increase trade and forge security cooperation with Southeast Asian countries.<sup>27</sup> Since 2014, the Act East policy has provided further boost to economic integration, cultural ties, and strategic engagement with India's extended neighbourhood, including the PICs.<sup>28</sup> The Indo-Pacific region has assumed greater significance in India's engagement with the countries of south, southeast and east Asia. Therefore, "Act 'East' is transforming into Act 'Indo-Pacific'."<sup>29</sup>

Initially, India's priorities in partnerships with the PICs were the same as with its partnerships with other newly independent developing countries, in that India shared its own developmental experiences and provided developmental assistance in the spirit of South-South cooperation.<sup>30</sup> One of India's motivations for engaging economically and socially with newly independent countries is the desire to not overly depend on developed countries. India's fundamental foreign policy aims include promoting human freedom, opposing colonialism, and creating equitable conditions for peaceful and harmonious socio-economic development of all countries.<sup>31</sup> India's development cooperation is based on the Development Compact, which aims to enhance cooperation between Southern actors. Unlike North-South development assistance, India's South-South Development Compact focuses on mutual growth and non-interference rather than the enforcement of specific conditions onto beneficiary-partner countries.<sup>32</sup> India's South-South Development Compact includes a comprehensive approach towards development activities and works in multiple levels, such as trade and investment, technology, skills upgrade, lines of credit (LOCs), and grants.<sup>33</sup>

To manifest this idea of cooperation among newly independent developing countries, India launched the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme in 1964. The ITEC Programme and India's Special Commonwealth African Assistance Programme (SCAAP) are flagships of India's partnership with other developing countries. The ITEC/SCAAP Programmes already implemented in the PICs include civilian and defence training, feasibility studies and consultancy services, deputation of Indian experts abroad, study tours, donations of equipment at the request of ITEC partner countries, and assistance for disaster relief.<sup>34</sup>

Even more than grants, a key element of India's financial development assistance is the extension of LoCs on concessional terms to least developed and developing countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. LOCs enable borrowing countries to import goods and services from India and to undertake projects for infrastructure development and capacity building, in accordance with their developmental priorities.<sup>35</sup> A main objective of India's technical and knowledge sharing programs and financial assistance is to foster small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and industrialization at the local level.<sup>36</sup>

India's development partnership focuses on beneficiary-partner countries' areas of need and aims to ensure sustainable and inclusive development. A mainstay of ITEC is capacity building programs.<sup>37</sup> India's capacity building programs encourage weaker and marginalized

sections of society to enter the mainstream development process. India has always believed that South-South Cooperation should be demand driven rather than supply driven.<sup>38</sup> However, there are some barriers in India's development partnerships with other countries. The primary barrier is India's difficulty in being the sole funder of large projects. As a developing country, India's resource constraints become a major factor in delaying or not doing infrastructure projects. Such projects are important for India's own connectivity with its regional neighbours, and access to more internal and third-party resources would likely help meet growing demand for cooperation and facilitate the implementation of projects.

### **India-Pacific Islands Development Cooperation from Past to Present**

India's modern presence in the Pacific began during the British colonial period, with Indian seamen working on British ships. In early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Indian workers were taken from Reunion Island to work in the French colony of New Caledonia. From these humble roots, members of the Indian diaspora in the islands now operate trading and financial companies, serve in government, and contribute to island economies and cultures.

#### ***Melanesia***

Initially, India's presence in the Pacific Islands was largely predominant in Melanesian countries, especially Fiji. From 1879, Indian workers came to Fiji to work in sugar plantations. Many of these migrant workers, unable to return home, settled down in Fiji and later migrated to other PICs. India's political leaders became involved in the PICs after they learned about the suffering of Indian migrant workers, and Mahatma Gandhi sent an Indian lawyer to provide legal assistance to the workers.<sup>39</sup> Soon after its independence, India established a diplomatic Commissioner in Fiji in 1948 and upgraded the post to High Commissioner in 1970, after Fiji's independence.<sup>40</sup> Prior to the 1970s, India established an Indian bank and two insurance companies in Fiji. The visit of Fiji's Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in 1971 laid the foundation for cooperation between India and Fiji. The first ever Indian Cultural Centre abroad opened in Fiji in 1972.

India's 1990s Look East Policy energized India's interactions with Southeast Asian countries, and the government started paying greater attention to its neighbours across the ocean in the east, forging greater economic and commercial linkages with Southeast and East Asian nations. India enhanced its political and diplomatic interactions with countries in the Pacific

Ocean as these countries gained independence. For example, fellow Commonwealth member Samoa declared independence from New Zealand in 1962. India became the second country, after New Zealand, to establish diplomatic relations with Samoa in 1970, facilitated through the Indian High Commission in New Zealand. India also opened a resident mission in PNG in 1996, and reopened its mission in Fiji in 1999, which had been closed in 1990 in the wake of the 1987 coups there. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Fiji in 2014. President Pranab Mukherjee also visited PNG in 2016, the first ever visit by an Indian head of state to PNG. The joint statement issued during the state visit by the Indian president to PNG addressed an interest in cooperating on areas of mutual interest for both countries, including energy security, maritime security, tourism, terrorism, and disaster management.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Polynesia and Micronesia***

In 1973, India's assistance moved beyond Melanesia when the Indian government extended assistance in the form of clothes and medicines to Tonga, an archipelago in Polynesia. India's economic engagement in Micronesia also began in the 1970s with the Government of India's purchase of phosphate from Nauru and the Government of Nauru's investment in India's Paradeep Phosphates in 1981. Following a request from Nauru, the Government of India bought back Nauru's shares in 1993.<sup>42</sup> Today, all Polynesian and Micronesian countries, like Melanesian countries, receive an annual grant from India for development projects.

### ***Regional and multilateral forums***

In the 2010s, India expanded its diplomatic outreach to the PICs, notably with the launch of the FIPIC in Suva, Fiji, in 2014. The Forum set up a business accelerator at the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, a nongovernmental trade association and advocacy group headquartered in New Delhi, to provide necessary information for trade and investment, facilitating meetings between businesses from both sides, exchanging business delegations, and organizing events and trade fairs.<sup>43</sup> Since its launch, the FIPIC platform has regularly facilitated high-level engagement with all the PICs. Speaking in Singapore in 2018 at the IISS Shangri-la Dialogue, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted, "The meetings of the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation, or FIPIC, have bridged the distance of geography through shared interests and action."<sup>44</sup>

Additionally, Indian and PIC government leaders regularly meet during UN General Assembly meetings. At a “Leaders Meeting” between India and the PSIDS, held in New York in September 2019 during the 74<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized India and the PSIDS’ shared values and future. He highlighted the need for inclusive and sustainable development policies that reduce inequality and contribute to the empowerment and improvement of all people’s lives.

India is also a dialogue partner in the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), a regional political and economic policy organization founded in 1971.<sup>45</sup> The PIF has 18 members : Australia, the Cook Islands, FSM, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. (Note that in February 2021, the five Micronesian states, (Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, FSM, Nauru, and Palau, declared they would withdraw from the Forum.<sup>46</sup>) India provided USD 1.9 million in grant assistance to Tuvalu to build a convention centre for the PIF leaders’ summit in 2019. India’s diplomatic interactions have also increased with other PICS. From 2014 onwards, there have been frequent meetings among heads of state, heads of government, foreign ministers, and other officials. The frameworks of FIPIC, the Sustainable Development Summit, and PSIDS have provided opportunities for regular interaction at high levels. The 2019-2020 Annual Report by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs states, “Guided by the spirit of solidarity and South-South Cooperation, India has for long partnered in development efforts of PICs by sharing its experience and expertise. This special relationship has deepened in recent years as we see the evolution of ‘Act East Policy’, resulting in setting up of action-oriented Forum for India-Pacific Island Cooperation (FIPIC).”<sup>47</sup>

In the recent past, India evolved a new policy synergy to deal with global challenges, such as climate change and natural disasters. India has a coastline of over 7500 kms, including about 2000 kms along its 1382 islands. Climate change and the vulnerability of coastal areas is, therefore, a common concern between India and the PICs, and India works closely with PICs on international climate change issues.

In the broader ecosystem of India-PICs relations, the private sector and CSOs have also broadened their engagement. In 2015, India’s prominent business organization, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) launched a Business Accelerator for the

Forum for India-Pacific Islands cooperation.<sup>48</sup> In collaboration with the GoI, Indian companies implement people-centric projects at the grassroots level, including:

- i) An Indian CSO, Bhagwan Mahaveer Vikalang Sahayata Samiti (Jaipur Foot Organisation), organized an artificial limb fitment unit in Fiji in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Fiji in 2011.<sup>49</sup>
- ii) The private sector Apollo Hospitals of India set up a telemedicine facility at the Fiji National University (see Box 2).
- iii) An Indian CSO, the Barefoot College provided training to elderly women from rural and remote communities in use of solar power and other skills.

We discuss these initiatives, including GoI funding for some of them, in further detail below.

### **Major Areas of Cooperation for India-PICs Contemporary Partnerships**

The individual context of each Pacific Island is unique, but as described above, they face several common challenges, including geographic isolation, small populations, limited infrastructure, modest economic growth prospects, depletion of natural resources, and climate change vulnerabilities. Other common development challenges include governance constraints, political tensions and instability, limited opportunities for women and high levels of gender-based violence, and the pressures placed on formal and informal economies to meet employment expectations. The PICs also face non-traditional security threats from infectious diseases, irregular migration, food shortages, human and drug trafficking, and transnational crime.

India's development partnerships with PICs have attempted to address the above issues by expanding cooperation several areas through grants, LOCs, concessional loans, humanitarian assistance, capacity building, and technical assistance. Health, IT, education, and community development are primary areas of cooperation. Indian private sector businesses and CSOs also engage with PICs on widening horizons. PICs are vulnerable to rising sea levels, cyclones, earthquakes, and other natural disasters because of their geographic location and climate change, and India has proactively assisted the PICs during natural disasters.

India's bilateral and multilateral initiatives have enhanced its relations with the PICs. In monetary terms, India committed USD 134 million in aid to the Pacific from 2014-2018,<sup>50</sup>

pursuing relatively greater cooperation with the two largest Melanesian economies, Fiji and PNG. According to the Lowy Institute's Pacific Aid Map, India had a total of 105 ongoing and completed projects in the Pacific between 2011 and 2018.<sup>51</sup> Over these years, India dedicated nearly half of its total financial aid to the Pacific Islands towards Fiji (43.9 percent), while PNG received the second most at 16.2 percent. Although India's development cooperation initiatives have primarily centred on Fiji and PNG, India has also provided aid and assistance to numerous Micronesian and Polynesian countries, as noted below.

### *Development Cooperation in Melanesia*

#### *Financial assistance*

Since 2005, India has provided Melanesian countries with concessional loans, grants, and three LOCs to Fiji and PNG for projects in renewable energy, agriculture, small infrastructure, and small-scale industries. Table 1 shows that India extended nearly USD 156 million in LOCs, first to Fiji in 2006 for the modernization of its sugar industry and then USD 100 million for infrastructure development in PNG in 2016, out of which USD 60 million went to the Bayer-Madang Road project and USD 40 million went to the Hoskins-Kimbe Road project.

**Table 1: India's Lines of Credit to Pacific Island Countries, 2005-2017**

Year of Approval	Country	Borrower	Amount of Credit (in USD million)	Purpose	Date of signing of LOC by the recipient with Exim Bank
2005-2006	Fiji Islands	Fiji Sugar Corporation, Fiji Islands	50.4	Restructuring the sugar industry in Fiji Islands	7 Nov 2005
2012-2013	Fiji Islands	Fiji Sugar Corporation, Fiji Islands	5.38	Upgradation of sugar industry in Fiji	4 Feb 2015
2016-2017	Papua New Guinea	Government of Papua New Guinea	100	Development of Road and Infrastructure sectors	17 Jan 2019
		<b>Total</b>	<b>155.78</b>		

Source: India Exim Bank<sup>52</sup>

Outside of Melanesia, in September 2019, India announced a LoC of USD 150 million for PSIDS to undertake renewable energy and climate projects. India has also provided more than USD 11 million in grants to the developing island-countries between 2005 and 2012.

### *Digital cooperation*

India has also established IT infrastructure across the PICS. India provided financial and technical support to many PICs for university IT centres, upgrading IT infrastructure, and training programs. In 2018, India supported the establishment of a Centre of Excellence in IT at Fiji National University.<sup>53</sup> India's Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) implemented the project under a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the GoI and Fiji. India has also provided grants for upgrading IT and computers in offices and diplomatic missions in Palau. In PNG, India established the Mahatma Gandhi Centre of Excellence in Information Technology (MGCEIT) through financial and technical assistance to the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG). The CEIT provides a series of short- and long-term courses to public servants, teachers, and graduates. The project converted an existing facility into four learning spaces (two lecture rooms and two tutorial rooms), administration and office facilities, student spaces, and a library.

Additional initiatives taken in PICs, in Melanesia and beyond, include a USD 150,000 grant in Fiji for updating IT facilities at the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial High School; establishing a Centre of Excellence in IT at the University of South Pacific in Alofi, the capital of Niue, in coordination with the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing of India (CDAC); setting up the Centre of Excellence in Information Technology at the National University of Samoa, Apia; creating a Centre of Excellence in IT in the Solomon Islands National University; establishing the Information Technology Innovation Lab Project in the Oè-Cusse region of Timor-Leste, under the India-UN Development Partnership Fund, which aims to enhance IT literacy in schools; and signing an MoU with Vanuatu to establish an India-Vanuatu Centre of Excellence in IT.

### *People-to-People Contacts*

India shares a cultural and diaspora link with the region, and a considerable number of people of Indian origin live in Fiji and PNG. The Indian diaspora is mostly engaged in services like IT, management, finance, banking, education, healthcare, and the hotel industry. A large number of schools and colleges in Fiji, as well as a university, medical college, and nursing colleges are run by diaspora community organisations. Hindi is one of the official languages of Fiji, and a Regional Hindi Conference was held at Suva in January 2020 in collaboration with Fiji's Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts. The GoI organizes the Pravasi Bhartiya

Divas (Day of Indian Diaspora) in India every January. On this occasion, several persons and organizations from Fiji have received the Pravasi Bhartiya Samman (Indian Diaspora Award). Indo-Fijians also participate in the Indian Government's program for diaspora children, Know India Programme (KIP). During the past three years, 148 Indo-Fijians have visited India under the KIP.

The Indian Council of Cultural Relations established the inaugural Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) in Fiji in 1972 and it was renamed the Swami Vivekanand Cultural Centre (SVCC) in May 2018. The SVCC provides classes in Indian classical music and dance, Hindi language, and Yoga. It regularly organizes cultural evenings, exhibitions, film shows, workshops, and discussions.<sup>54</sup>To mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India's Independence, the High Commission of India in Fiji organized a six-month long Festival of India named, *Namaste Pacifika* in 2017-2018 in Fiji and other PICs.<sup>55</sup>

Although Fiji is the major focal country for India's cultural interactions, India has expanded its cultural interactions with other countries. An Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)-sponsored Siddhi Dhamal dance troupe visited PNG in October 2013. In association with the University of Papua New Guinea, the High Commission of India organized an Indian Film Festival at the University in 2013 in PNG. Additionally, a set of the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi was also presented to the University of PNG Library.<sup>56</sup>Furthermore, the ICCR and the PNG University of Technology (UNITECH) signed an MoU in 2018 to establish a long-term ICCR Chair of Indian Studies at UNITECH. Another MoU on cooperation in the field of diplomatic training was signed between the Foreign Service Institute, India and the Department of Foreign Affairs of PNG in 2019.<sup>57</sup>

India also engages in cultural activities across PICs other than Fiji and PNG. The International Day of Yoga is celebrated in the PICs and has drawn participation from multiple countries' prime ministers. Additionally, the global celebration of Mahatma Gandhi's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday became a cultural connection when a singer from each PIC sang Mahatma Gandhi's favourite devotional song (*Vaishnav Jan to*). In Nauru, President Baron Waqa sang this 15<sup>th</sup>-century devotional song.

### *Disaster relief*

India has adopted a multi-pronged approach to support the PICs through natural disasters. In addition to humanitarian and technical assistance, India also invited specialized PICs agencies for skills trainings focused on managing disasters. India also established an early warning system for natural disasters that helps countries make informed decision about ensuring safety and reducing damage. After a tsunami struck the Solomon Islands in 2007, India provided relief and rehabilitation for victims. India also supplied USD50,000 in disaster relief to Palau in the wake of Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2014,<sup>58</sup> provided humanitarian assistance to Vanuatu after Cyclone Pam hit in March 2015, and again to Ambae Island after volcanic eruptions in 2018. India assisted the Fiji government in renovating 20 schools after Cyclone Winston in 2016; India also gifted Fiji with five tons of vegetable seeds. India supplied PNG with earthquake and restoration work after the Ulawun volcanic eruptions in 2018 and 2019. Additionally, India sent relief material to Fiji after Cyclone Yasa struck on 17-18 December 2020; the first materials arrived on 2 January 2021. Despite challenges posed by the pandemic, India's National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) airlifted over 6 tons of relief supplies to Fiji in record time with effective cooperation among multiple agencies in India, Australia, and Fiji.<sup>59</sup>

In May 2016, Prime Minister Modi, meeting with Fijian Prime Minister Bainimarama, announced that India would strengthen cooperation in disaster management with all PICs, including through the Space Applications Centre for the region.<sup>60</sup> In September 2019, at the UN Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit in New York, Prime Minister Modi launched the Coalition for Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), which has a secretariat in New Delhi, and is supported by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) to enable knowledge exchange, technical support, and capacity building in the PICs. Australia and Fiji count among the 12 founding members of the CDRI (Box 1).<sup>61</sup>

#### **Box 1. The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a global Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) at the UN Climate Action Summit 2019. It is a partnership of “national governments, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks, financing mechanisms, private sector, and knowledge institutions for promoting the resilience of new

and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks in support of sustainable development.”

The CDRI aims to “promote rapid development of resilient infrastructure to respond to the Sustainable Development Goals’ imperatives of expanding universal access to basic services, enabling prosperity and decent work.” Its strategic priorities include technical support and capacity-building, research and knowledge management, and advocacy and partnerships.

Source: CDRI<sup>62</sup>

### ***Development Cooperation in Polynesia***

Since 2005, India has provided the Cook Islands with audit software and supplied computers and accessories, furniture, and equipment for educational institutions. It also gave the Cook Islands specialized vehicles for people with disabilities, upgraded fishing materials for villagers, constructed public utilities, and supplied equipment for cricket tournaments. Since 2006, India has constructed roads and houses in Niue, renovated youth and sports centres, and upgraded the Niue market. In 2017, India helped Niue set up a 4G cellular network. In 2006, India provided Samoa with dialysis machines and related equipment. In Tonga, beginning in 2007, India constructed an access road from the wharf to the village of Hunga. India also upgraded the jetty, provided 1200 uniforms to the Tonga military, and improved the country’s Public Service Commission’s IT software.

### ***Development Cooperation in Micronesia***

India has provided multiple Micronesian nations with a significant amount of financial assistance in the form of disaster relief and grants for various purposes, from agriculture to healthcare. For example, in 2015, India supplied FSM with USD 200,000 worth of grants for the purchase of machinery for coconut cultivation and processing.

India’s development partnership with Kiribati began in 2006 with providing prosthetic and orthotic components and materials to Tungaru Central Hospital Rehabilitation Centre, amounting to AUD 1,5982.39.<sup>63</sup> India also supplied prosthetic and orthotic materials to the Tungaru Central Hospital Rehabilitation Centre. In addition, India provided Kiribati with an upgraded government printing press, and three grants to fund a 500-kW generator and overhead cables to replace old generators, cherry-picker trucks, the renovation of three health

clinics, and, in 2017, a grant of USD 1.1 million for solar-powered lighting in the South Tarawa district.

In 2005, India provided the Marshall Islands with USD 242,500 to purchase solar panels and a two-way radio set for the Outer Islands Health Centre and the Ministry of Health.<sup>64</sup>In 2008, India also provided the Marshall Islands with a grant of USD 100,000 for solar-powered lighting in the country's capital city, Majuro. Additionally, following a state of emergency brought about by a drought in 2013, India provided the Marshall Islands with disaster relief assistance of USD 100,000. India also supplied the Marshall Islands with USD 162,833.10 for the purchase of minivans, computers, and communication equipment.

In 2007, India supplied Nauru with a 16-seater van for Nauru's Members of Parliament, an eight-seater van for the Speaker of the Nauru Parliament, and two 30-seater buses for school children.<sup>65</sup> India has also supplied Nauru with USD 100,000 for teacher recruitment and USD 450,175 in 2015 for the construction of a sea wall. India also assisted Nauru with the construction of the Government Expatriate Employees Apartment project, which involved the conversion of hotel rooms into self-contained units for expatriates from 2008-2015. Additionally, an Indian audit officer worked on deputation as an audit director for the Government of Nauru from 2008 to 2011.

In 2005, India gave Palau a cash grant for kitchen equipment that was installed in the Belau National Hospital.<sup>66</sup>India also provided USD 149,841 for the purchase of kitchen equipment for the Palau National Hospital, USD 100,000 in 2008 for the purchase of a boat and two pick-up trucks, grants for IT and computer upgrades in offices and diplomatic missions, USD 182,471 in 2014 as assistance for the country's hosting of the PIF. In addition to cash aid following Super Typhoon Haiyan, Indian assistance to Palau has included helping the country organize the Pacific Media Summit in 2016. Additionally, India upgraded and modernized a Palau community healthcare centre, and, as a part of the project for solarisation of all Head of States' residences across the PICs, assisted Palau with this solarisation. Both projects were funded by the India-UN Development Fund.<sup>67</sup>

### *Health Partnership with PICs*

Access to tertiary healthcare in most of the PICs is a critical concern. Patients requiring advanced healthcare often travel to India and other countries for treatment. Some smaller

PICs are unable to offer specialist services, and thus need to make overseas medical referrals more frequently than other countries at similar stages of development. As a result, the PICs spend a disproportionate percentage of health finance on medical referrals and evacuations, both within and outside the countries.<sup>68</sup> At the Pacific Islands Meeting on Subregional Collaboration for Specialised Healthcare Services, organized by the World Health Organization (WHO) in Suva in February 2019, representatives of Tonga, Kiribati, and Nauru said that they referred patients to India and other countries.<sup>69</sup>

India has prioritized healthcare in its assistance to PICs and has enabled much advancement in Polynesian countries. For example, in 2007, India supplied Tuvalu with computers, medicine, medical equipment, ambulances, water supply, storage, and management assistance for the country's hospitals. India provided additional funds to Tuvalu for the Princess Margaret Hospital to procure a new ambulance in September 2014, and to acquire medical and dental equipment in October 2014. Indian private sector healthcare providers have also provided their services to PICs on a commercial basis. One of them, the Apollo Hospitals Group of India, organized medical visits of specialists to the region and entered MoUs with Samoa and Tonga, as well as the Melanesian country of Fiji. The Group believes that the Indian government and private sector could cooperate to improve healthcare services in the PICs by establishing specialty hospitals, medical centres, and telehealth services. The Group also conducted training programs for health professionals from PICs at Apollo hospitals in India and intends to expand such training through online courses (see Box 2).

**Box 2.**

**Interview of Dr. Harinder Sidhu, Vice President, Corporate Development, Apollo Hospitals**

**Tell us about your experience of collaboration in the Pacific Island countries. How has it improved access to modern healthcare? How useful is telemedicine?**

Apollo Hospitals has a very fruitful relationship with the Pacific Islands. Apollo has signed MoUs with the Government of Fiji, Government of Samoa, and the Government of Tonga. Over the last seven to eight years, more than 10 visits from Apollo Hospitals to Fiji have occurred, which included meetings with multiple stake holders. Apollo Hospitals has collaborated with public and private sectors in Fiji. Apollo's teams of specialists, comprising of oncologists, cardiologists, cardiac surgeons, orthopaedists, gynaecologists, neurosurgeons,

and renal transplant surgeons, have visited the island country to share their experience, expertise, and services.

Apollo Hospitals has organized medical camps at the Lautoka Hospital and Colonial War Memorial Hospital (CWM) in Fiji, Tupua Tamases Meaole (TTM) Hospital in Samoa, and Vaiola Hospital in Tonga. Apollo also has ties with Fijian insurance companies, and Apollo has organized several camps, health awareness lectures, and conferences with Fiji's police and military.

Apollo Hospitals has an MoU with Fiji National University (FNU) for telemedicine services in the region, which is currently unable to be utilized due to some FNU challenges. Apollo delegates have also participated in two seminars organized by the Fijian Ministry of Health and Fiji Medical Association. In 2014, Apollo conducted a Medical Symposium, Fiji - Health for All, in collaboration with the Fiji Ministry of Health and FNU. It was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Fiji, Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama. In 2019, Apollo Hospitals also participated in the Annual Pacific Conference (AIMS) held in Tonga, where the Cancer Development Services report was prepared and submitted by an Apollo Hospitals oncologist and presented by the Apollo Group President.

A large number of patients from Samoa, Tonga, and Fiji have been treated at Apollo Hospitals in India. The mutually rewarding collaboration has helped Pacific Island countries access modern healthcare facilities and obtain the best clinical outcomes.

**(ii) How can we enhance our cooperation in the healthcare sector?**

India has managed to develop globally renowned healthcare systems that offer quality healthcare at affordable prices. Establishing a state-of-the-art tertiary care hospital in one Pacific Island country as a hub connected to other nations could replicate some of India's best practices in the healthcare field. It is also important to train professionals from Pacific Island countries to organize and operate technologically advanced systems. Shaping the pedagogy of professional and technical healthcare education remains an essential area of development cooperation between India and the Pacific Islands, and it has significant untapped potential.

**(iii) Potential areas of engagement in healthcare sector in the Pacific Islands**

Healthcare models in the Pacific Islands are influenced by its remote location, wide geographic spread, and availability of resources. The following list identifies potential areas of engagement that can improve healthcare delivery in the Pacific Islands:

### ***Medical Centres***

The Pacific Islands should establish medical centres with the capacity for basic diagnostic tests and telemedicine. These centres can be managed by healthcare operators, such as Apollo Hospitals. Telemedicine in these centres can also be used for advanced consultations.

### ***Telehealth Services***

Telehealth services from Apollo Hospitals specializes in using healthcare IT in innovative ways to deliver quality healthcare services across regions, and it is experienced in establishing and operating tele-healthcare as in the context of strengthening public health systems in India. Establishing such systems in the Pacific Islands would enable accessibility, affordability, equity, and quality in healthcare.

### ***Specific Modules***

*Emergency Management:* Advanced healthcare centres, like Apollo Hospitals, can upgrade existing emergency management facilities in the Pacific Islands with improved online connectivity. Apart from upgradation, these facilities should be equipped with new ambulances and medical professionals trained in emergency care.

*Electronic Intensive Care Unit (EICU):* Intensive care units in the Pacific Islands can be connected electronically to advanced centres like Apollo Hospitals in India for around-the-clock monitoring of critically ill patients, which will improve quality of care and outcomes. This tool would alleviate the lack of critical care specialists in the Pacific Islands.

*Non-invasive Cardiac Centres:* Changing lifestyles have caused a surge in cardiac issues. Holistic management requires massive infrastructure and highly skilled doctors, but establishing non-invasive cardiac centres in the Pacific Islands with tele-connectivity to India can help resolve this issue. These centres can be equipped with electrocardiograms (ECG), treadmill ECG stress tests, and echocardiograms.

*Dialysis Centres:* Problems with hypertension and diabetes can lead to chronic renal failure. Therefore, dialysis centres are critical for the support of patients who cannot afford to travel for renal transplants. The Indian government should help the Pacific Islands by setting up dialysis centres.

*Sugar Clinics:* Diabetes has become alarmingly common, and the Pacific Islands require quality diabetic care centres. Sugar clinics, which are innovative, single specialty diabetes

and endocrine healthcare service providers, would help the Pacific Islands make diabetes care more available.

*Online Medical Courses:* The medical industry is constantly evolving, which necessitates that healthcare professionals always stay updated with the latest trends and technologies. Medvarsity, an e-learning venture through Apollo Hospitals, can help the Pacific Islands' medical fraternity stay informed through online medical education, which would make quality education accessible to healthcare professionals across specialties and experience levels.

### ***Capacity Building across the Pacific Islands***

India has been engaged in diverse training programs in multiple areas under the ITEC Programme. It has established, technically supported, and financially supported educational institutions. In its new initiatives, India has also encouraged CSOs to engage in the PICs in areas of mutual interest. Occasionally training programs are organized in the region itself. The program considers partner countries' specific requirements, and experts are also deputed for training, as advisors, and for undertaking studies.

In its efforts to support local institutions, India has cooperated with the University of the South Pacific (USP). Established in 1968, the USP is jointly owned by the governments of 12 countries, with campuses in each: the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, the Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Samoa. Its main campus is in Laucala, Fiji.<sup>70</sup> In 2019, India provided the USP a grant of USD1 million through the Asian Development Bank for regional technical assistance (RETA) on "The Creation of the Pacific Information Superhighway with The University of the South Pacific Network."<sup>71</sup>

Additionally, the USP collaborated with the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi, and other institutes for curriculum development, exchange of distance flexible learning (DFL) expertise, training of USP staff, and live-streamed course delivery. USP uses the term DFL to refer to learning that offers choice of location, mode of delivery, and pace. Academic exchange and cooperation were also established in areas of joint research, policy dialogue, capacity building, and publications for national, regional, and

international fora. Additionally, Indian universities collaborate in faculty exchanges, joint research, and assistance to the USP in the area of economic modelling.<sup>72</sup>

Outreach of India's capacity building programme has widened significantly to meet the growing needs of its partner countries. The GoI has taken other measures in several sectors, such as renewable energy, agriculture, IT, and health.

### Sustainable Development

In 2007, a workshop on Sustainable Development took place in Suva. It was jointly organised by the PICs and Indian Mission in March 2007, in association with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), an Indian think-tank. The workshop provided training on sustainable development for PIF member countries, covering themes such as renewable energy, rainwater harvesting, and waste management and treatment. Participating countries included the Cook Islands, FSM, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, PNG, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

Ten years later, in 2017, the GoI organized the India-Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference (IPISDC) at Suva, Fiji. Minister of State for External Affairs of India, General V.K. Singh (Retd.) hosted the event, which was attended by high level delegations from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, FSM, Nauru, Niue, Palau, PNG, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The conference was held under the FIPIC framework, in partnership with TERI and India's National Disaster Management Authority and the Indian Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change along with the FICCI, CII, and the PIDF.<sup>73</sup>

During the two-day conference, India and the PICs discussed the blue economy, climate-change adaptation, mitigation practices, disaster preparedness, health, and the International Solar Alliance. Discussions sought practical solutions for nationally determined contributions (NDC) implementation. India and several PICs signed MoUs to expand cooperation; these included agreements to set up Centres of Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT)(like the Mahatma Gandhi CEIT in PNG discussed above)in Fiji, the Cook Islands, Nauru, Samoa, and Niue and other projects in Fiji for youth development, broadcasting agencies, and renewable energy.<sup>74</sup>At the same conference, India announced a contribution of USD 1 million to Fiji's Trust Fund for their Presidency of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP-23

Climate Summit) in November 2017. Fiji, a leading voice on sustainable development, saw its Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama receive a Sustainable Development Leadership Award-2019 from TERI in February 2019.

An Indian delegation from the Ministry of Earth Sciences also visited PNG in 2019 on a scoping mission to establish the Institute for Sustainable Coastal and Ocean Research in Pacific region and network of marine biology research.

### ***Indian CSO Engagement***

The GoI has supported both Indian and local CSOs for active participation in development works at the community level. For example, the GoI and the Barefoot College in Tilonia, India partnered in a program that trained elderly rural women in solar energy. Barefoot College, a CSO, focuses on least developed countries. “Barefoot Solutions” include the delivery of solar electrification, clean water, education, and livelihood development. The College trains women worldwide to become solar engineers, innovators, and educators.<sup>75</sup> Other Indian CSOs active in the PICs include the Jaipur Foot Organization and TERI. Local Indian diaspora CSOs include the Girit Council of Fiji and other organizations running educational institutions in Fiji. The Barefoot College has worked with local CSOs, such as the Locally Managed Marine Area Networks in Pacific Countries and the Kolomotu’a community in Tonga. In 2012, the Kolomotu’a Solar Project in a rural community in Tonga was launched, using the training of two elderly women through the Barefoot College. The solar equipment was provided by the OKEANOS Foundation headquartered in Germany.<sup>76</sup>

Following the 2015 FIPIC, the GoI, building on previous success, tasked the Barefoot College to implement the Women’s Barefoot Solar Engineering initiative in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, FSM, Niue, Palau, PNG, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The government of India provided USD 1.25 million to the Barefoot College for equipment, including 40-watt solar systems, robust portable rechargeable lanterns, a village-based repair and maintenance workshop, and a wi-fi-enabled community learning centre, in every community within the project, and sensor technology that allowed for real-time data collection on key environmental and performance indicators across the region. This would be the largest and most comprehensive data gathering system on decentralized solar delivery by women across the world. Barefoot College International is

currently shipping 2600 BINDI SOLAR, India-made home lighting systems. These products are also made by women at the Barefoot College.

### ***Indian Private Sector Engagement***

The Indian private sector has launched corporate social responsibility and shared value initiatives in the PICs. The GoI expanded its development cooperation horizons through involving the private sector in development projects. There are a number of areas, such as agriculture, healthcare and life sciences, infrastructure, renewable energy, digital cooperation, and education, skill development, and training in which the private sector can play a useful role in the PICs. The GoI and the Indian private sector can expand and diversify bilateral trade and encourage investments in fisheries, agriculture, oil and natural gas, and water desalination in the PICs.<sup>77</sup> Some Indian private organizations cooperate with institutions in their areas. For example, the Apollo Hospitals Group has a fruitful relationship with the Pacific Islands, and Apollo has official MoUs with the Government of Fiji, Government of Samoa, and Government of Tonga. Another group, Sahyadri Hospitals, set up surgical facilities in Fiji in collaboration with Fiji's Health Ministry. These commercial collaborations provide Pacific Islands' citizens with access to modern healthcare with the best clinical outcomes.

### ***Quick Impact Projects***

A Quick Impact Project (QIP) is a popular modality for Indian development cooperation because of the allure of "short projects, small money." QIPs mostly cover upgradation of physical infrastructure, such as roads, local community centres, and social infrastructure in education, health, sanitation, and community development sectors.

Small grants can immensely help a community. For example, the construction of raised concrete platforms for a local village handicrafts and fruits market in the Cook Islands helped vendors keep their wares off the ground, saving them from environmental damage and making them more attractive to tourists. Another example was the provision of desks and chairs in a community school located in the building that had been renovated. India has also given 800 sewing machines to women in Fiji's rural communities and remote islands, contributing to women's self-employment and empowerment.

## **India-PICs Trade and Investment Linkages**

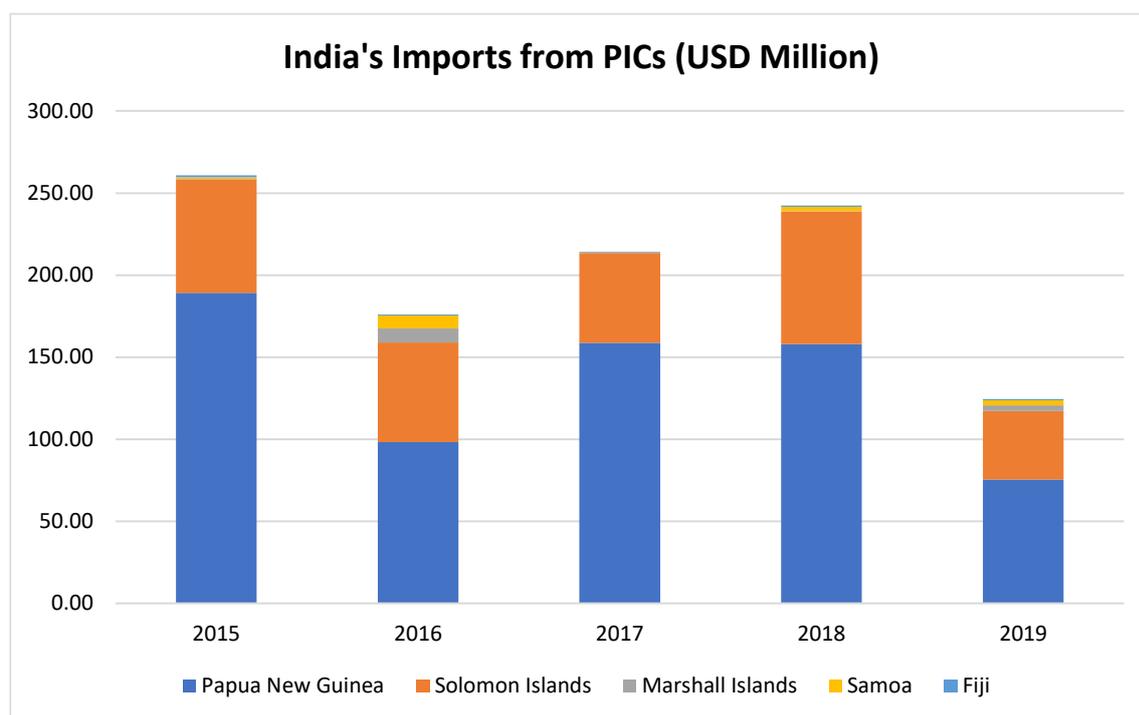
### *Trade Statistics*<sup>78</sup>

India has established economic linkages with almost every country in the PICs. However, the long distance, small PICs markets, and logistical difficulties, including the absence of direct shipping links, have led to limited trade and investment. Since the 1970s, India's collaboration with the PICs has encompassed global, political, and economic issues, such as trade negotiations and UN reforms. The majority of India's trade takes place with Fiji, PNG, the Marshall Islands, and the Solomon Islands, of which trade with PNG, the Marshall Islands, and Fiji accounted for approximately 75 percent of India's total trade with the 14 PICs between 2019 and 2020. Despite the stated aims of India's Act East Policy, India-PICs trade relations have not flourished, and trade volumes remain low.

### *India's Imports from PICs*

In 2019, the top five largest PICs exporters of goods and commodities to India included PNG, the Solomon Islands, the Marshall Islands, Samoa, and Fiji. However, the value of India's imports from these countries has declined across the board since 2015. For example, imports from PNG have declined from USD 189.28 million in 2015 to USD 75.48 million in 2019, and imports from the Solomon Islands declined from USD 68.98 million in 2015 to USD 41.74 million in 2019.

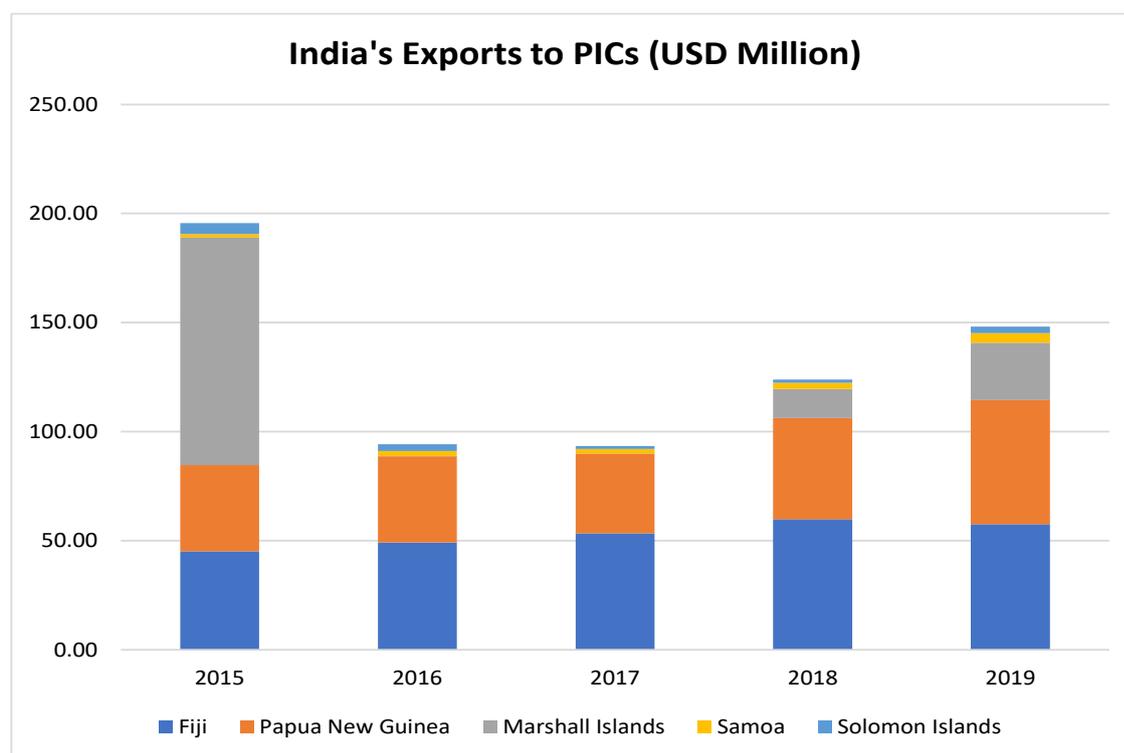
Some main commodities imported by India from PICs in 2019 were petroleum oils and oils obtained from bituminous minerals, other than crude, from Palau, the Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu. Wood was the fifth largest by value commodity India imported from PNG at USD 1.5 million and the third largest by value imported commodity from the Solomon Islands. Ferrous waste and scrap were amongst the major commodities imported from Fiji and Tonga.

**Figure 1: Indian imports from five largest PICs exporters, 2015-2019(in USD Million)**

Source: World Integrated Trade Solution<sup>79</sup>

### *India's Exports to PICs*

In 2019, India's top five importers among the PICs were Fiji, PNG, the Marshall Islands, Samoa, and the Solomon Islands (Figure2). India's exports to Fiji have increased from USD 45.17 million in 2015 to USD 57.54 million in 2019 and exports to PNG have increased from USD 39.40 million in 2015 to USD 56.87 million in 2019 while India's exports to the Marshall Islands have declined significantly from USD 104.50 million in 2015 to USD 26.28 million in 2019.

**Figure 2: Indian exports to five largest PICs importers, 2015-2019(in USD Million)**

Note: Data for the chart has been extracted from UN COMTRADE database using the HS 2012 product classification.

Source: World Integrated Trade Solution<sup>80</sup>

Major products that PICs imported from India in 2019 included articles made of precious metals other than gold or silver, which were the top Indian exports to Fiji at USD 3.5 million. The major Indian exports to the Marshall Islands, at USD 25.18 million, included cruise ships, excursion boats, and similar vessels. Producer gas or water gas generators were the largest exported commodity to Samoa at USD 1.9 million. Medicaments containing penicillin or derivatives were amongst the top five exported commodities to Kiribati, Samoa, and Tonga, and medicaments containing other antibiotics were the major exported commodities to Palau, PNG, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. India exported USD 1.84 million medicaments containing other antibiotics to PNG in 2019. Among the top five exported commodities to FSM and Samoa were floor, wall, or ceiling coverings made of vinyl chloride polymers. Tee-shirts, singlets, and other cotton vests were among the fourth largest exported products to Fiji in 2019 at USD 1.9 million and the largest exported commodity to the Cook Islands. Sweet biscuits were amongst the top five exported commodities from India to Tonga and Vanuatu. Shawls, scarves, mufflers, and other clothes made of various textile materials

were also among the top exported commodities to the Cook Islands and Tonga. India also exported portable automatic data-processing machines to both Nauru and Niue.<sup>81</sup>

Mutually beneficial areas where trade between India and PICs could be strengthened include Indian imports of fisheries, agriculture, oil and natural gas, and other minerals. India should explore trade complementarities with the PICs to benefit from increased bilateral trade.

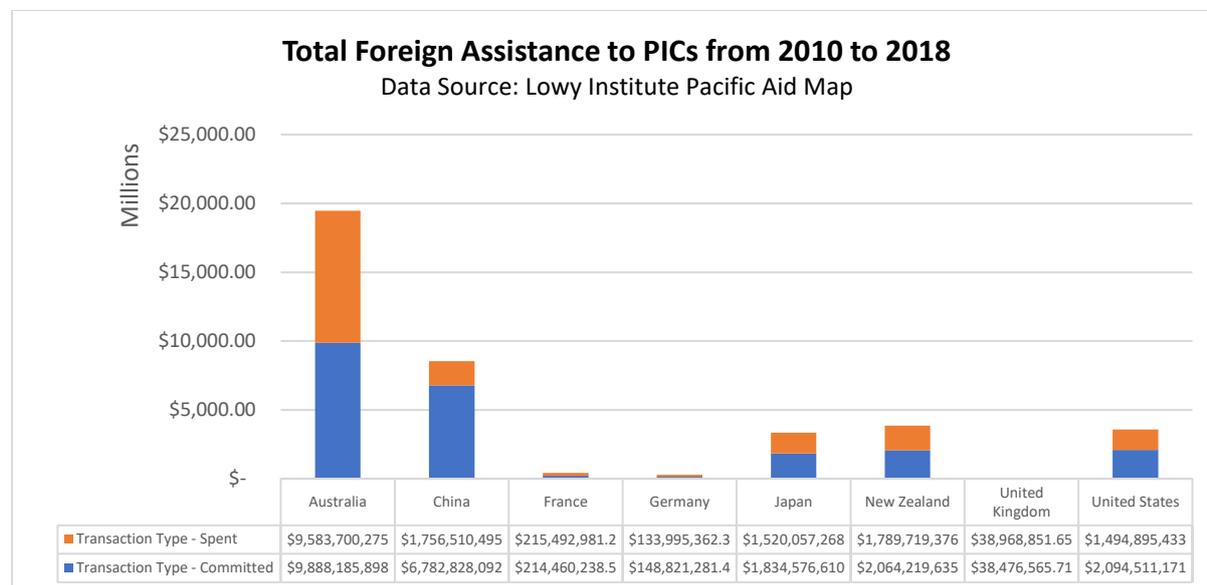
### **India-PICs Trilateral Development Partnership Landscape and Potential**

In the broader ecosystem of India's trilateral relations with countries engaged in the development cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, there is substantial scope for additional development in the PICs. While in the past, India made a point to distinguish its demand-oriented, non-conditional approach from that of Northern donors, which impeded effective triangular cooperation to a certain extent. However, India's current positioning has become more flexible and pragmatic. Thus, depending on the strategic context and the issues concerned, India's capacity and appetite for triangular cooperation with Northern donors has strengthened, particularly when India can exhibit the pertinence of its cooperation within the ideational framework of Southern solidarity.<sup>82</sup> Some observers see evidence of this trend in India's participation in the rise of foreign policy-oriented "mini-laterals" in the Indo-Pacific region, which are small multilateral groups of three countries sharing common interests.<sup>83</sup>

India's appetite and capacity for triangular cooperation matters because geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific are changing, and the region is now defined as "the new theatre for strategic competition."<sup>84</sup> Countries engaged in the region see the Indo-Pacific as a platform to operationalize economic, political, and security strategies. For example, Japan has articulated a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy."<sup>85</sup> India's vision for the Indo-Pacific focuses on a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific, and aims for multi-faceted engagement with all countries in the region, encompassing political, security, economic, and socio-cultural spheres to achieve Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).<sup>86</sup> Triangular cooperation has, therefore, become another important vehicle for the benefit of the region through the combined efforts of North and South donor capacities. India could begin or do more work with other countries, such as Australia, Japan, France, the US, and the European Union, to benefit PICs through tripartite constructs. There are challenges in bringing together two different systems of assistance for a common cause, but India is

confident that such hurdles can be overcome for the greater good. Figure 3 and Table 2 indicates other foreign assistance to the PICs, apart from India's.

**Figure 3: Total Foreign Assistance to PICs, 2010-2018 (in USD Million)**



**Table 2: Summary of Donor Countries' Development Policies, Priorities, and Assistance**

Country	Development Policy in the Indo-Pacific Region	Top Priorities	Total Assistance to PICs from 2010-2018 in USD <sup>87</sup>
<b>Australia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pacific Step-up<sup>88</sup></li> <li>• Indian Ocean Rim Association<sup>89</sup></li> <li>• Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response<sup>90</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic cooperation</li> <li>• Climate change</li> <li>• Sustainable development</li> <li>• Human resource development</li> <li>• Security cooperation</li> <li>• Cyber security</li> </ul>	19,471,886,173.39
<b>China</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belt and Road Initiative</li> <li>• China-Pacific Island Countries Economic Development and Cooperation Forum<sup>91</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable development</li> <li>• Trade cooperation</li> <li>• Agriculture and fisheries</li> <li>• Energy</li> <li>• Infrastructure development</li> </ul>	8,539,338,588.34
<b>France</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indo-Pacific Strategy<sup>92</sup></li> <li>• First Trilateral Dialogue between France, India, and Australia<sup>93</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public health</li> <li>• Climate change</li> <li>• Environmental protection</li> <li>• Economic cooperation</li> <li>• Maritime security</li> </ul>	429,953,219.82
<b>Japan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy<sup>94</sup></li> <li>• Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of Cybersecurity<sup>95</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good governance</li> <li>• Development cooperation</li> <li>• Cyber security</li> <li>• Maritime security</li> <li>• Connectivity enhancement</li> </ul>	3,354,633,879.49
<b>New Zealand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pacific Reset<sup>96</sup></li> <li>• Strategic Intentions 2020-2024<sup>97</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change</li> <li>• Economic resilience and integration</li> <li>• Regional security</li> <li>• Human rights and Gender</li> <li>• Health and education</li> <li>• Good governance</li> </ul>	3,853,939,011.81
<b>United States</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pacific Pledge of the Indo-Pacific Strategy<sup>98</sup></li> <li>• Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network<sup>99</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change</li> <li>• Good governance</li> <li>• Security cooperation</li> <li>• Cyber capacity</li> <li>• Infrastructure development</li> </ul>	3,589,406,604.00
<b>Other European Countries (Germany and United Kingdom)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Germany's Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region<sup>100</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change</li> <li>• Geopolitical competition and cooperation</li> <li>• Peace and security</li> <li>• Digital transformation and connectivity</li> </ul>	282,816,643.83
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UK's Indo-Pacific Tilt<sup>101</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change</li> <li>• Maritime security</li> <li>• Trade cooperation</li> <li>• Science and technology</li> </ul>	77,445,417.35

## *Australia*

India and Australia, vibrant and multicultural democracies, share a multifaceted relationship. Their partnership has been gradually widening and deepening in areas of trade, energy and mining, science & technology, information technology, education, and defence. Australia attracts a large number of Indian students. Additionally, the popularity of cricket has further contributed to raise wider awareness about each other. India-Australia relations have gained new momentum in the 21st century. Both the countries established a ‘Strategic Partnership’ in 2009. Various institutional mechanisms, evolved over several years, have facilitated greater bilateral cooperation.<sup>102</sup> Their previous relationship evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership at a virtual summit between the two countries’ Prime Ministers on 4 June 2020. In response to the 6th Raisina Dialogue, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison describes the Australia-India relations as a “story of deep trust, shared ambition and a united commitment” and awaits bilateral opportunities specific to Cyber and Critical Technology Partnership and on economic cooperation.<sup>103</sup> The Quad’s joint statement also lists key cooperative areas, namely health security, cyber space and critical technologies, infrastructure development, maritime security, and counterterrorism.<sup>104</sup>

From these common interests, there are two ways in which India and Australia could collaborate in the Indo-Pacific. First, a defence and security partnership between India and Australia is important to the protection of PICs’ vast maritime resources and the enhance of regional security in the area. Aside from trade, the two countries forged a cooperative defence partnership that extends beyond consultations and institutional collaboration. Second, skill development and migration programs are a potential area for collaboration. India could leverage Australia’s financial aid through effective partnerships in several areas, especially capacity building and needs-based training programs. For example, Kiribati has followed a policy of skilling its people so they can find jobs overseas. Since 2011, Kiribati has sought multiple training slots under the ITEC Programme for capacity building, including five training slots in 2011-2012, and four in 2012-2013.<sup>105</sup> India could collaborate on Australia or New Zealand funded capacity building initiatives in Kiribati and/or other PICs interested in similar skill development programs. Overall, the PICs would be an important area for expanded cooperation between India and Australia in areas such as disaster management, cyber security and skills development, and community development; a variety of PICs-

oriented development programs would complement the upward trajectory in the overall India-Australia partnership.

### *China*

Increasing development aid, particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is part of Beijing's larger geopolitical ambition in the Indo-Pacific region. However, analysts have pointed out several concerns about Chinese aid, such as financial sustainability, unsustainable debt, human rights, labour rights, and environmental issues. Several PICs, including Tonga, Samoa, and Vanuatu, are already significantly indebted to China.<sup>106</sup> As PICs become increasingly wary of Chinese loans and investments, the region may turn to India for investment opportunities, which may create opportunities for other donor countries to partner with India in triangular cooperation arrangements to balance geopolitical influence in the region.

China and India are both emerging donors in the Indo-Pacific region. However, research on the two countries' development assistance to PICs remains nascent. As one of the few studies on this topic, Zhang and Shivakumar's comparative analysis of Chinese and Indian aid in the Indo-Pacific region show that the two countries' approaches are heterogenous.<sup>107</sup> They differ in history, scale, and foci. For instance, concessional loans account for the bulk of Chinese aid in the region while Indian aid has largely been in the form of grants and scholarships. Although there are notable differences, both countries' aid motives are geared towards advancing its diplomatic interests. Chinese Ambassador to India H.E. Sun Weidong's statement for the celebration of 70 Years of China-India diplomatic relations shows that India and China have a history of collaboration in various fields such as economy and trade, science and technology and defence.<sup>108</sup>

And while tensions remain between the two countries, H.E. Sun Weidong's statement presents an optimistic view on Sino-Indian relations in hopes of "enhancing mutual trust, focusing on cooperation, managing differences and seeking common development".<sup>109</sup> It is too early to say whether a trilateral partnership between India, China, and PICs will occur, but China's and India's long history of collaboration and mutual interests may constitute possible partnerships in the future.

## *France*

France's 2021 Indo-Pacific Strategy discusses key collaborative areas for India and PICs.<sup>110</sup> France seeks to strengthen its strategic partnership with India particularly through the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). In the inaugural foreign secretary-level trilateral dialogue in September 2020, India, France, and Australia discussed the priorities, challenges, and trends in regional and global multilateral institutions, including the best ways to strengthen and reform multilateralism.<sup>111</sup> During the dialogue, the three countries discussed economic and geostrategic challenges and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and in terms of cooperation to preserve and protect the marine global commons. In a follow-up meeting on 24 February 2021, they took stock of the progress made since the dialogue on maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), the blue economy, protection of the marine global commons, cooperation in multilateral fora, and combatting illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing.<sup>112</sup> As for PICs, the Indo-Pacific Strategy announces a partnership between France and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). This partnership will focus on the following priority areas: "public health, climate change, the ocean, and sustainable management of natural resources, and will foster the promotion of shared values, including gender equality".<sup>113</sup> The French territories of French Polynesia and New Caledonia also became members of the PIF in 2016 and approximately 500 persons of Indian origin live in New Caledonia; this evidence of ties between France and India could provide the basis for mutually beneficial cooperation partnerships in the Pacific Island region.

Furthermore, India and France may find further scope for trilateral development cooperation through their collaboration in the International Solar Alliance (ISA), an India-France initiative, founded in March 2018 under the auspices of President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Founding PICs ISA members PNG, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga, and Tuvalu were joined by Samoa, which became the 85<sup>th</sup> member of ISA in December 2019. The ISA's mission, that "every home no matter how far away, will have a light" is particularly relevant for the PICs.

## *Japan*

Japan also facilitates development in the Pacific region. As noted above, India and Japan share a vision to promote a regional order that is based on transparent institutions, good

governance, international law, and ensures secure supply chains and fair access to resources.<sup>114</sup>As members of the Quad, Japan and India have shared commitments on the following areas: cyber space, critical technologies, counterterrorism, quality infrastructure investment, humanitarian-assistance, disaster-relief, and in maritime domains.<sup>115</sup>Bilaterally, Japan and India have thus agreed to align their two regional strategies: Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy and India's Act East Policy.<sup>116</sup>Both countries are exploring new avenues for trilateral development cooperation and for cooperation under the framework of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). Since Japan and PICs are neighbours and both Japan and India share a deep historical relationship with the PICs,<sup>117</sup> Japan and India should work together to promote development in the region. India-Japan development cooperation would offer capital, technology, and development experiences to the Pacific Islands. For example, as a start, in October 2020, Japan and India finalised a Memorandum of Cooperation in cyber security; they should leverage that agreement by assessing the possibility of strengthening cyber security capacities of the PICs.

### *New Zealand*

New Zealand is one of key development actors in the Pacific Island region. In 2018, New Zealand launched the Pacific Reset, the country's new foreign policy for the region.<sup>118</sup>In its inception, the Pacific Reset focused on strengthening its political relationships with PICs, examining the implications its New Zealand's domestic policies for PICs, and supporting Pacific regional organisations. It is also guided by five key engagement principles: "Understanding; Friendship; Mutual Benefit; Collective Ambition; and Sustainability."<sup>119</sup>From the evaluation of its first year of implementation, the Reset has achieved a range of strategic objectives. For instance, New Zealand has supported PICs in gaining access to global climate finance and participating in international climate change advocacy and negotiations. New Zealand also launched the Pacific Vision for Pacific peoples in Aotearoa to strengthen its support for Pacific languages, cultures, and communities. From these outcomes, New Zealand's increased official development assistance aims to strengthen its support to PICs in the following thematic priorities and activities, climate change, economic resilience, education and health, human rights and gender, and governance.

New Zealand has also shown an inclination towards strengthen its relations with India. This was mentioned in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Strategic Intentions 2020-2024. This policy document operationalises the Ministry's Strategic Framework and

stipulates the Ministry's goals and perceived outcomes in international cooperation.<sup>120</sup> In this document, New Zealand aims to take a proactive and integral role in the Indo-Pacific and to "refine and focus engagement with India" to support its international strategy. From 1952, India and New Zealand have since been working closely in various areas. For example, a Free Trade Agreement with India has been under negotiation since 2007.<sup>121</sup> From the recommendations of the Joint Study Group and the approval of India's Trade and Economic Relations Committee, India has been working with New Zealand on the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement.<sup>122</sup> This agreement will include goods, services, and investments.

"India is a priority relationship for New Zealand. We share common democratic traditions, growing two-way trade, extensive people-to-people links, and a common strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific region," said Foreign Minister Winston Peters in a meeting with India's Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar in February 2020.<sup>123</sup> This shows that New Zealand's and India's history of collaboration and mutual interests present tangible opportunities towards trilateral partnership between the two countries and PICs, particularly in areas of trade, technology, and skills development. First, since New Zealand wants to facilitate open and free trade in the region, trade relations can be strengthened through the NZ-India free trade agreement should the negotiations be expedited and finalised in the coming years. New Zealand's goal of enabling open trade also overlaps with the Quad's interests. This shows great potential for trade relations. New Zealand has also been "seeking out 'Indo-Pacific' cooperation" particularly with Quad nations due to its security and strategic concerns.<sup>124</sup> India, along with the Quad, can certainly leverage this to seek more opportunities for cooperation. Second, India can utilise the International Solar Alliance to collaborate with New Zealand on solar energy in the Indo-Pacific, especially since New Zealand has shown interest in the organisation.<sup>125</sup> Lastly, India can support New Zealand's Pacific Reset objectives on labour mobility and information and communication technology. As mentioned earlier, India has the necessary expertise which may be shared to key organisations and institutions in PICs to support these Reset initiatives.

### *United States*

There is a so-called "New Great Game" for influence in the Indo-Pacific region, which has arisen with the confluence of three strategies: China's Maritime Silk Road, India's Act East Policy, and the US' Rebalance to Asia, as established under former US President Obama, and

more recently, its 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy. Established under former President Trump, the new US strategy sees India as a major partner.<sup>126</sup> As part of the Quad, the incumbent US President Joe Biden issued a joint statement with Australia, India, and Japan in early 2021 which emphasises the four countries' commitment to cooperation in a range of areas, particularly on health security in the context of COVID-19.<sup>127</sup>

Amidst evolving regional dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region, India, and other donor-partner countries engaged with the PICs, can explore opportunities for cooperation in areas of mutual interest with the US. However, this cooperation depends on how each country's political synergies evolve in the Indo-Pacific region. In view of the growing US-India partnership, opportunities for collaboration in specific projects in PICs should be explored. For instance, under the Partnership for Food Security, which combines United States Agency for International Development (USAID) efforts and India's food and nutritional security and adaptation programs, the US and India applied India's innovative, cost-effective solutions to farming challenges around the world, such as low-cost tractors, seed systems, and water management technologies, in partnership with the GoI, CSOs, and the private sector. The programs support development innovations that have proven successful in India and other developing countries and that have potential to contribute to help the rural poor.<sup>128</sup> Under this partnership, projects in the agriculture sector in the smaller PICs could be undertaken.

India's fruitful trilateral collaboration with US agencies in the agricultural sector could also be leveraged in other sectors of mutual benefit to the PICs, India, and the US, such as infrastructure. In September 2019, the US announced a new USD 100 million grant under the Pacific Pledge of the Indo-Pacific Strategy. This assistance was in addition to the approximately USD 350 million that US agencies invest in the region annually. As part of the Pacific Pledge, USAID plans to provide more than USD 63 million in new program, more than doubling development assistance from prior years. Under the Pacific Pledge, the US increases the PICs' resilience to environmental challenges, such as natural disasters, with weather forecasting, resilient infrastructure, expanded connectivity, and enhanced good governance, maritime security, security cooperation, and cyber capacity.<sup>129</sup> The United States also made an initial grant to the Asian Development Bank's Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility (PRIF) to support infrastructure planning in the Pacific Islands. Additionally, the US established an Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network (ITAN), which will invest in building infrastructure in the aviation and digital sectors, among others, in the Indo-Pacific

region.<sup>130</sup> Aside from potential partnerships on agriculture and infrastructure, trilateral cooperation between the US, India, and PICs may very well expand into other Quad priority areas stated above.

### ***Other European Countries***

The United Kingdom and Germany have also facilitated development in the Pacific region. Generally, the primary focus of European donors in the region is climate change adaptation. For instance, Germany recently released its Indo-Pacific guidelines, which declared that Berlin hopes to enhance its interactions with PICs by sending high-level representatives to summit meetings and promoting further projects as a dialogue partner of the PIF.<sup>131</sup> Germany's policy guidelines discuss the country's approach to climate change adaptation and environmental protection. Specific to PICs, the guidelines stipulate the expansion of its support against the impending threats of climate change. The guidelines also mention Germany's willingness to work with India on climate protection and adaptation and renewable energies. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom sees India as a major partner in the Indian Ocean. This is evident in the UK's 2021 foreign policy, particularly its framework entitled the Indo-Pacific Tilt.<sup>132</sup> This framework talks about collaborative opportunities in areas of climate change, maritime security, and India. In addition, it aims to strengthen its relationships with countries including India to promote its science and technology diplomacy. The overlaps in Germany's and the UK's foreign policy interests with India show great potential towards trilateral projects in PICs. India also shares comprehensive relations with the Netherlands, and the two countries may explore into policy orientation and evolving trends to assess the possible PICs-related policy synergies.

### ***Other Mechanisms***

As well as working bi- and trilaterally with other countries, India has also explored avenues for cooperation in the PICs through multilateral organizations, notably the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) and the IBSA Fund. India also participates in an informal strategic dialogue –the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) –alongside Australia, Japan, and the US, which is a forum that aims to maximise cooperation opportunities in the Indo-Pacific region.

### *India-UN Development Partnership Fund*

The India-UN Development Partnership Fund (I-UNDPF), created in 2017, is a facility within the United Nations Fund for South-South Cooperation (UNFSSC) that supports demand-driven sustainable development projects in developing countries, focusing mainly on least developed and small island developing states.<sup>133</sup> India has committed to donating USD 150 million to the I-UNDPF over 10 years in USD 15 million tranches; the donation includes USD 50 million to a separate facility within the Fund dedicated to commonwealth developing countries. The I-UNDPF is managed by the UNOSSC and implemented in collaboration with the UN. The umbrella UNFSSC has advanced 13 SDGs in 31 partner countries through projects in agriculture, education, renewable energy, climate change adaptation, governance, health, employment and livelihoods, and water and sanitation.

The I-UNDPF has begun the implementation of a USD 1 million project to establish early warning climate systems in the Cook Islands, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, FSM, Nauru, the Solomon Islands, and Tonga. The I-UNDPF's Pacific Office in Fiji, in collaboration with PIDF and Solar Head of State (SHOS), plans to implement a USD 1 million project for the solarization of head of state residences. SHOS, a non-profit based in the US, was formed by a worldwide team of grassroots activists aligned with solar energy social entrepreneurs from around the globe and aims to help world leaders become green leaders.<sup>134</sup> The I-UNDPF has also implemented solar-powered refrigeration systems in the Marshall Islands, with a budget of USD 575,000, and supported a USD 1.5 million project to improve resilience to climate change by upgrading facilities and equipment for 10 community health centres in Palau. The project includes repair and replacement of roofs, clinic walls, cabinets, ceilings, and floors, and the installation of new energy-efficient lighting and air conditioning.<sup>135</sup> In addition, the I-UNDPF is funding a new USD 500,000 project to repair and reconstruct an export building and fumigation facility underway in Tonga.<sup>136</sup> The I-UNDPF also helped develop PNG's information, communications, and technological capacity by creating the Mahatma Gandhi Centre of Excellence in Information Technology (MGCEIT) discussed above.

### *IBSA Fund*

The IBSA Fund is an initiative from India, Brazil, and South Africa for poverty and hunger alleviation across the South. The Fund aims to “alleviate poverty and hunger in nations of the South... develop best practices in the fight against poverty and hunger by facilitating the

execution of replicable and scalable projects in interested countries of the Global South... pioneer and lead by example the South-South cooperation agenda...[and] build new partnerships for development.”<sup>137</sup>The IBSA projects are implemented through partnerships with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), national institutions, and local governments. The UNOSSC is the fund manager for this initiative.

The IBSA Fund has empowered rural women across the PICs and taken on projects in the PICs towards sustainable and economic development that may be replicated, such as scaling up a rocket stove<sup>138</sup> project in Fiji, enhancing inclusive sustainable economic development in the coconut industry in Kiribati, and a sustainable agriculture and permaculture learning centre on Atauro Island in Timor-Leste. Such projects could be shared with other countries in the PICs if desired; the resident Indian mission could then recommend projects to the IBSA Fund.

### *The Quad*

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is an informal strategic forum among Australia, India, Japan, and the US; it originated in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami that devastated the coastlines of several countries in South and Southeast Asia. After a hiatus, the Quad saw a revival in 2017 amid discussions on deepening cooperation based on shared values and principles.<sup>139</sup> Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, in his opening remarks at the second Quad Ministerial Meeting in Tokyo, Japan on 6 October 2020, noted that the in-person meeting, despite the global pandemic, was a testimony to the importance that the consultations.<sup>140</sup> The first Summit of Quad leaders, in a virtual format, on 12 March 2021 reaffirmed the four countries’ commitment to quadrilateral cooperation. The leaders’ joint statement pledged to combat climate change, and address shared challenges, including those in the cyber space, critical technologies, counterterrorism, quality infrastructure investment, humanitarian-assistance, disaster-relief, and in maritime domains across the South, including the PICs.<sup>141</sup>

The Quad in March 2021 also agreed to a plan to respond to the economic and health impacts of COVID-19 by pooling their financial resources, manufacturing capabilities, capacities and logistical strengths to ramp up the manufacture and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>142</sup> The American president and prime ministers of Australia, India and

Japan declared that the vaccine initiative will be guided by the Quad Vaccine Experts Working Group that brings together their sharpest scientific leaders.<sup>143</sup>

### **India-PICs Development Cooperation Policy Recommendations**

In recent decades, India has made efforts to engage in development cooperation with the PICs, often successfully. However, there is still room to expand current and future development partnerships and political interactions. The policy recommendations below offer ways in which India might enhance development relations in the PICs through bilateral and multilateral relationships that foster further political, economic, cultural, and technical cooperation.

#### ***Political***

- There should be more bilateral engagements and high-level political interactions between India and Pacific Island heads of state, for instance through annual meetings during the UN General Assembly conferences. Additionally, India should invite Pacific Island heads of state to India's Republic Day (January 26<sup>th</sup>) and promote similar initiatives, such as the national-day events that India supports in ASEAN countries.
- India should find more avenues for multilateral negotiations, such as those concerning climate change or those that take place through the World Trade Organization (WTO) and regional Pacific forums.
- Quad delegations should explore opportunities for jointly addressing the needs of the PICs. One such opportunity is the annual PIF Summit. India and other countries should explore the possibility of a Quad-PICs Development Forum; this could be at the level of permanent representatives to the UN.
- The Quad, as a recently revitalized organisation with four members, should expand its priorities beyond security towards development and work with India to develop trade and other forms of engagement with PICs.
- Quad and other concerned donor countries should find areas of possible collaboration in the PICs, such as technical cooperation, educational collaboration, joint research and development, agricultural development, markets access, and space and maritime cooperation. Possible areas of collaboration include coordinating visits of healthcare professionals to the PICs for free medical camps, IT and skills training assistance to

educational institutions, joint professional training for diplomats, and managerial, administrative, and financial support for SMEs. The Joint Statement of Quad Leaders released on 12 March 2021, discussed focusing on women's empowerment and engaging women in the use of solar energy and community development; it also promoted developing youth through sports and cultural appreciation. The possibility of Quad governments or CSO partnering with Indian CSOs in PICs should also be explored.

### *Economic*

- More active engagement between India's public and private sectors to strengthen local economies and economic diversification should be established. Projects that can be replicated across the PICs and that would cover a range of needs including building hard and soft infrastructure for coconut processing, water storage and distribution, access roads in small islands, and providing mining equipment. The aim of empowering women could be attained by training women in solar energy and crafts using local materials, improving communications, particularly through mobile phones and internet, providing sewing machines to rural women, and building spaces for village markets. As seen above, Barefoot College is a useful potential partner in the area of solar energy, community development, and women's empowerment. Training costs and international travel for trainees should be covered by India under its ITEC Programme, but a partnership with the Quad or with a donor country could take care of other expenses, such as the cost of travel from remote islands to international airports, solar equipment, and training of additional community members.
- Given the geographical setting of the PICs, promoting tourism is an important area of cooperation; this can include meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE). Australian companies operate cruise ships in the PICs, and the Quad or other donor-partner countries should promote these for tourism from India (and their own countries). One way to do this would be to include cruise tourism in films and cover it on specialized television channels, such as Travel XP of India, a leading global travel channel. Travel journalists and travel bloggers from donor-partner countries could cover the operations of cruise ships to and in the PICs. The PICs may be given free stalls at travel and tourism exhibitions in donor-partner countries with support for their participation, including travel costs.

- India and the PICs should explore opportunities for film shooting, including feature, documentaries, and advertisement films and music videos. This will also help promote tourism into the Pacific region.<sup>144</sup>For example, Indian film makers have shot some films in Fiji, which offers rebates to film makers as well as local actors and crew.<sup>145</sup>Cruises and tourism in the PICs from other countries may also be promoted by inviting film makers and music companies to show them available facilities and locations.
- Major Indian outbound tour companies may be invited to visit the PICs. Considering that India does not have direct flights to the PICs, the involvement of Australia and New Zealand in such an initiative would be useful and help in developing Australia-New Zealand- PICs packages from India.

### *Health*

- Public private partnerships (PPPs) in the healthcare sector should be explored. PPP models could involve the provision of space in hospitals and clinics by the recipient country, and Quad or other donor countries could provide other forms of support, such as nursing, equipment and medical supplies, and medical specialists sent to manage private hospitals.
- Quad and other donor countries may consider coordinating visits from healthcare professionals to the PICs for free medical camps, assistance to medical educational institutions, and equitable vaccine access for the Indo-Pacific (this could be an immediate area of cooperation). Collaborations with India should also focus on strengthening the health sector in the PICs by equipping clinics and providing medical supplies, especially in the smaller PICs. Development partners should help develop “health hubs” – permanent medical facilities such as hospitals and diagnostic or e.g., dialysis centres) in larger countries, opening them to the use of all PICs –as exemplified by the organization of artificial limb fitment camps for disabled persons in partnership with the Jaipur Foot Organization of India.
- While some Indian hospitals have entered into arrangements for training PIC medical professionals in India, there should be an exploration of a more institutionalized mechanism for the training of healthcare professionals from PICs abroad, such as those India’s ITEC Programme has set up with African and Asian countries but tailored to the culture and needs of the PICs.<sup>146</sup>

- There are substantial possibilities for the Indian government and Indian private sector hospitals to collaborate in the health sector. With greater use of the existing facilities, including those at nursing and medical colleges in Fiji, medical care workers can receive training more locally. These training facilities will benefit from greater coordination with hospitals in India and other countries.

### ***Cultural***

- India should organize more cultural events and festivals to promote people-to-people interactions, including festivals celebrating PIC cultures in India. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations, an organisation funded and manned by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, could take the lead in this.
- In addition to providing fellowships, Indian universities and institutions should collaborate more with PIC institutions for research and development on issues related to socio-economic development, such as climate change, sustainable development, economic diversification, renewable energy, and agriculture. The successful Indian collaborations with the USP and Fiji National University discussed above, for instance, could serve as a model. It is important that the smaller countries of the PICs also benefit from such collaborations.

### ***Technical***

- Given the geographical location of PICs, space sciences and applications could be an area of cooperation, including in areas like remote sensing and satellite tracking. At the FIPIC Summit in 2015, India stated that it would support the establishment of a space station in any of the PICs. Fiji provided immense support to India in its Mars Mission; India should set up a telemetry command centre on other Pacific islands. Space-based assets can monitor rising sea level, ocean wealth, and the behaviour and patterns of oceans and marine life.<sup>147</sup>
- India could provide many services to the PICs through a digital platform, including education and healthcare. Just as India's delivery of online courses to the USP can be replicated for other institutions in the PICs, Indian private sector hospitals should also expand telemedicine facilities to more PIC hospitals and clinics.
- Indian IT companies based in other countries, particularly the US and Australia, should outsource work to the PICs.

- India should expand training and knowledge sharing in areas of mutual interest by organizing trainings tailored to each PIC's needs in the region. These trainings would have a wider reach than those under ITEC Programmes in India and could build on the success of the regional training programs that India organised in Suva for diplomats, for diplomacy and other areas of interest.

### ***Agriculture, Fisheries and the Blue Economy***

- In Timor-Leste, the IBSA Fund has enhanced productivity in agricultural, horticultural, and fisheries through a permaculture centre that serves as a learning centre for sustainable agriculture and natural resources conservation.<sup>148</sup> This example is something that can be replicated throughout the PICs, especially since they have the potential to develop a vibrant blue economy, defined as the “sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs, while preserving the health of ocean ecosystem.”<sup>149</sup> Most of the PICs have large EEZs, and their societies traditionally engage in blue economic activities, but they face challenges,<sup>150</sup> such as providing market access for locally caught fish or island produce, skilling youth, developing businesses that add value such as fish processing plants, and connectivity and energy supply for remote islands. The Indian government and/or private sector should help meet the PICs blue-economy goals.<sup>151</sup>

### ***Climate Change, Mitigation and Adaptation***

- India and the PICs share a common concern about the effects of climate change and the vulnerability of coastal areas and islands. Therefore, India works closely with the PICs on international issues relating to the environment and climate change in line with India's commitment to tackling the impact of climate change and supporting PSIDS efforts to achieve developmental goals through necessary developmental and technical assistance. The PICs may be encouraged to implement projects under the Indian grants and LOCs to the PSIDS Programme.

### ***Paths for Further Development-Opportunities for Research***

Emerging political and strategic trends in India's development cooperation with PICs are likely to generate considerable academic and policy research interest. Subsequently, it will open new vistas for scholarly investigation.

As seen above, India has adopted multiple development initiatives and implemented various development projects in the PICs. The impact of these development projects needs to be academically examined to provide useful policy insights and introduce academic and social perspectives into the public discussion. In collaboration with public and private sector organisations, additional research should focus on sectors that would benefit from further Indian technical assistance and/or financing, such as agriculture, renewable energy, space technology, resilience to climate change and natural disasters, diplomacy, and health and education sectors. In particular, the scope for Indian provision of online trainings, education, telemedicine, tele-medical education, and regular online consultation should be examined. Specifically, India should identify the areas in which countries want to focus training, such as the case study on Kiribati's participation in India's ITEC programme cited above. Of skilling for jobs in Kiribati so Kiribatians would not need to migrate to other countries for jobs, or so they can migrate as skilled labour and enhance livelihoods and remittances. A further study should look at existing and potential capacities in smaller islands for such collaborations. A separate study should look at new sectors to develop, such as biotechnology, particularly as applied to aqua- and agriculture and the blue economy, where India could transfer its know-how and expertise to PICs.

As discussed above, PICs have a narrow economic base, are vulnerable in the face of natural disasters and have limited employment opportunities for the many migrant workers searching for jobs and livelihoods on these islands. Research institutes should study blue and/or green economic activities that are socially and environmentally viable in the PICs through multi-stakeholder efforts that may include CSOs and the private sector. Additionally, from an academic and policy perspective, it would be useful to map global development assistance to the region; this would clarify a recipient-country's requirements and inflow of assistance. Such information would also be helpful for India when collaborating with other nations, such as Japan and Australia. Research should also focus on new cooperation opportunities for India in the PICs.

Possibilities to expand India's triangular cooperation with Australia, Japan, and European nations, such as France, the United Kingdom, and Germany, should also be explored. As geopolitical trends suggest, both Quad and India-Australia-France triangular cooperation merit scholarly attention.

Also, since the aim of India's Development Compact is to make India's beneficiary partners self-reliant and capable of sharing their own developmental experiences with others, it would be useful to study ways in which beneficiary-partner PICs can be involved in project delivery for other PICs.

## **Conclusion**

Amidst shifting geo-political dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region, India and the PICs have widened their political interactions, economic engagement, and development partnerships in multiple areas. The PICs face multiple challenges emanating from their geographical location, narrow economic base, environmental vulnerability, natural disasters, migration, and a shortage of skills. These countries are among those most dependent on development assistance in the world and need greater political, economic, and technical support from their partners to effectively deal with these challenges. Since India has proactively provided support and promoted inclusive and sustainable development in the PICs for many years, the GoI hopes to build on past successes and engage more with these countries at all possible levels, including bilateral partnerships and through regional and global forums. To deepen and expand economic interaction with the PICs, India's business community should also create new forums and organise more initiatives. The GoI has also encouraged Indian CSOs to further share their experiences and expertise with the PICs since Indian CSO projects have created positive social impacts and contributed to Pacific Island populations' empowerment and inclusive development.

While most development assistance from partner countries is and will be bilateral in nature or will be conducted through UN and regional organizations, it is also important for India to implement trilateral and multilateral efforts and thereby amplify its proven capacities, particularly through funding for larger or more extensive projects than India can offer on its own. For instance, India has the expertise on cyber security and skills development, and Australia is particularly interested in this field for PICs. Overlaps in donor countries' interests and India's competencies show a great potential for trilateral partnerships in the future. Australia, Japan, and the US (bilaterally or under the Quad), and France, the United Kingdom, and other partner countries should explore areas of possible collaboration with India in order to intelligently augment strategic and practical development initiatives in the PICs and help all PICs achieve inclusive and sustainable development.



## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

Asia-Africa Growth Corridor	AAGC
Association for Southeast Asian Nations	ASEAN
Belt and Road Initiative	BRI
Centre for Development of Advanced Computing	C-DAC
Civil Society Organizations	CSOs
Coalition for Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure	CDRI
Compact of free association	COFA
Confederation of Indian Industry	CII
Exclusive economic zone	EEZ
Federated States of Micronesia	FSM
Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry	FICCI
Forum for India-Pacific Island Cooperation	FIPIC
Government of India	GoI
Gross domestic product	GDP
India Brazil South Africa	IBSA
Indian Council for Cultural Relations	ICCR
Indian Cultural Centre	ICC
Indian Ocean Rim Association	IORA
Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation	ITEC
Indira Gandhi National Open University	IGNOU
Information Technology	IT
International Monetary Fund	IMF
Know India Programme	KIP
Lines of Credit	LoCs
Mahatma Gandhi Centre of Excellence in Information Technology	MGCEIT
Memorandum of understanding	MoU
National Disaster Response Force	NDRF
Pacific Islands Countries	PICs
Pacific Islands Forum	PIF
Pacific Small Island Developing States	PSIDS
Papua New Guinea	PNG
Pacific Island Countries	PICs
regional technical assistance	RETA
Small and medium-size enterprise	SME
South-South Cooperation	SSC
Special Commonwealth African Assistance Programme	SCAAP
Swami Vivekanand Cultural Centre	SVCC
The Energy Research Institute	TERI
United Kingdom	UK
United Nations	UN
United States	US
United States Agency for International Development	USAID

United States dollar	USD
University of Papua New Guinea	UPNG
UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction	UNDRR
UN Office for South-South Cooperation	UNOSSC
University of the South Pacific	USP
World Health Organization	WHO

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