



International Centre for Democratic Partnerships

Australia-Pacific Connections  
for a Digital Future

# PACIFIC WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS- TECHNOLOGY INFLUENCERS

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DISCLAIMER: This report summarises the proceedings of the *Pacific Connect* Network Dialogue "*Pacific Women Entrepreneurs – Technology Influencers*", held on 16-19 June 2019 in Brisbane, Australia by ICDP. The report represents a range of views and interests of the individuals and organisations participating in the Dialogue. They are personal opinions that do not necessarily reflect those of the organisers and sponsors of the Dialogue.

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*Participants of the Pacific Women Entrepreneurs - Technology Influencers Dialogue*

## Communiqué

1. We, the participants of the *Pacific Connect* Network Dialogue on *Pacific Women Entrepreneurs – Technology Influencers*, met on 16-19 June 2019 in Brisbane, Australia at the invitation of the International Centre for Democratic Partnerships (ICDP), with the support of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).
2. We would like to thank our hosts – Simone Pensko, Tina Briggs and the staff of ICDP – for their excellent arrangements and warm welcome to Brisbane, and Queensland Parliament House for hosting the event. We also thank Catherine Fritz-Kalish, Zha Agabe-Granfar and Michael Collins for their skilful facilitation of the sessions, and keynote speakers Dr Anna Wright, Julie Gibson and Kalolaine Fainu for sharing their inspiring stories with us.
3. We congratulate the organisers for assembling an impressive array of emerging female leaders from the Pacific and Australia. Participants had diverse backgrounds and experiences across a number of sectors, including business development and coaching, entrepreneurship and start-ups, government, academia, education, information and communication technologies, agriculture, real estate, the arts and creative industries, unmanned aerial vehicles, and assistive technology.
4. We applaud Australia's step-up in engagement with the Pacific and its commitment to build stronger, long-lasting relationships with Pacific Island nations. We believe that *Pacific Connect* and the 'Second Track' process offer opportunities to collaborate and build personal rapport in an informal, consultative environment that encourages positive, fresh thinking and a personal interest in achieving practical results. For Pacific women in particular, who may feel their voices are not always being heard, the 'Second Track' offers a safe and neutral platform to share stories and experiences, extend networks, broaden opportunities for professional and personal development, and seek projects and ideas to change their lives.
5. We acknowledge that people must have a reason to connect and stay connected in order to build enduring relationships. We think that translating ideas into concrete projects is the best way to achieve this. We are inspired by the success of previous *Pacific Connect* Dialogues and projects such as 'Every building is a classroom' in the Solomon Islands and the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers Pacific Hub in Samoa, as they demonstrate what can be achieved through sustained collaboration.

6. We recognise the need to empower women in the Pacific and the growing role of female entrepreneurs in economic and social development across the region. Encouraging female leadership of projects and networks and helping more women to create their own enterprises will invigorate Pacific economies and benefit all members of society.
7. We agree that digital technologies play an increasingly important role in people's lives and have the potential to transform the livelihoods of Pacific communities. We have learned through examples such as BindiMaps and Hitnet about the positive power of digital technologies to help vulnerable and disadvantaged people and the need to involve the community in co-designing future solutions. We also discussed the key ingredients of creating a successful business – personal conviction, listening to customers, continuous innovation, strong partnerships and collaboration, supportive environment such as co-working spaces, a long-term vision, and passion for change.
8. We considered several areas for action, including potential projects which Dialogue participants could pursue collectively or in subgroups. These include:
  - a. Storytelling and digital content – Pacific film distribution in remote areas
  - b. Developing a members-only online platform for the *Pacific Connect* community
  - c. Commercial cooperation around cocoa bean traceability and education – a potential joint project between Lukasco, TraSeable Solutions and Hitnet
  - d. Enabling after-hour services for retail businesses
  - e. Supporting entrepreneurialism that embraces Pacific culture
  - f. Creative education using Indigenous culture in Australia's education system
  - g. Building an online retail estate workflow to streamline home-purchasing processes in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and tackle contract backlogs
  - h. Developing online payment gateways to enable money transfers for small business
  - i. Educating people about the Pacific through compelling stories and content about its produce
  - j. Exploring the use of drones and barges for development in PNG and the Solomon Islands through collaboration between the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Soli Drone Services and Lukasco
  - k. Empowering Pacific entrepreneurs through business management training (James Cook University) and workshops and coaching in future *Pacific Connect* Dialogues
  - l. Educating Pacific businesses about the power of online social media platforms such as Instagram to tell their story and find new customers

9. We have slated the following four projects for immediate action, while recognising the value of other ideas:
  - a. **Mobile Cinema** – enabling Pacific film distribution in remote Pacific communities, building on the Pasifika Film Fest's experience, QUT's technological expertise, and Global Access Partners' network
  - b. **Digital Farmer** – educating Pacific farmers about technology and digital solutions
  - c. **Payment Gateway** – developing an online payment capability for Pacific businesses, based on Fiji Finds' model
  - d. **The Network** – building a members-only online platform for *Pacific Connect* alumni to share profiles, contact information and areas of interests by extending the functionality of the existing Slack group and ICDP's website.
10. We will develop these ideas and opportunities through further meetings, ICDP's Slack forum and a dedicated Facebook page for the *Pacific Connect* Community. We appreciate the importance of clear objectives and firm timelines and will mobilise existing resources and adapt best international practice where possible. While not every idea from the Dialogue may come to fruition, we hope that the time and effort spent on their development will strengthen our personal links and form a foundation of longer-term relationships.
11. We were inspired by our visit to The Precinct, the Queensland Government's innovation hub, and greatly appreciated our guided tour of the *Women's Wealth* exhibition at the Queensland Art Gallery – Gallery of Modern Art.
12. We welcome the invitation to participate in the *Pacific Connect* Ideas Exchange, planned for Sydney, Australia on 18-19 September 2019, and look forward to forming closer bonds with other members of the fast-growing *Pacific Connect* Community.

## Executive Summary

### Background

*Pacific Connect* was launched by the Prime Minister of Australia in September 2017 to encourage better relationships between emerging Pacific and Australian leaders in the public, private and community sectors. *Pacific Connect* is run by ICDP and funded by DFAT.

Since the official announcement of *Pacific Connect* at the 48<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum, ICDP has been working with regional partners and local leaders to create a series of Network Dialogues. The inaugural Business Network Dialogue was held in March 2018 in Port Moresby; the Academic Network Dialogue convened in Suva in June 2018, co-hosted by the University of the South Pacific; the Creative Arts Dialogue was held in Apia in July 2018; and the Education Dialogue took place in Honiara in November 2018. On 6 September 2018, 80 *Pacific Connect* Network members attended the inaugural *Pacific Connect* Forum at NSW Parliament House in Sydney, and the *Pacific Connect* Community was officially launched.

The year 2019 opened with the *Pacific Women in Business and Digital Delivery* Dialogue in Brisbane in February, the *Digital Trade and Labour Mobility* Dialogue in Port Vila in March, and the *Disruptive Technology in Agriculture* Dialogue in Port Moresby in April.

On 16-19 June 2019, ICDP hosted its second Brisbane Dialogue, titled *Pacific Women Entrepreneurs – Technology Influencers*. The event, held at Queensland Parliament House, brought together **21 participants** – a diverse group of current and emerging leaders from Australia, Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Tonga – to develop a network and identify opportunities for collaboration under the theme of 'Australia-Pacific Connections for a Digital Future'.



Dialogue participants came from a broad range of backgrounds, including business development and coaching, entrepreneurship and start-ups, government, academia, education, information and communication technologies, agriculture, real estate, the arts and creative industries, unmanned aerial vehicles, and assistive technology.

The aim of the Dialogue was to explore commercial opportunities and innovative business models enabled by improved connectivity in the Pacific, ways to encourage more women to transition into the tech industry and entrepreneurship, the challenges facing Pacific women in information and communications technology (ICT), and potential solutions. The Dialogue provided a space for participants to make connections, identify common challenges and select potential projects to take forward.

The Dialogue was sponsored by DFAT and facilitated by **Catherine Fritz-Kalish**, Director, ICDP, Co-Founder and Managing Director, Global Access Partners (GAP), **Zha Agabe-Granfar**, Executive Director, Verge Limited, PNG, and **Michael Collins**, Partner, Strategic Development Group.

## Summary of Proceedings and Outcomes

Twenty one emerging leaders – **12 Pacific Islanders and 9 Australians** – convened over two days: firstly, at a networking meet and greet at the Westin Hotel, followed by a day of brainstorming and discussions at QLD Parliament House and a welcome dinner at the Royal on the Park Hotel. Discussions were held under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution to allow for a frank and constructive exchange of ideas and were facilitated in accordance with the principles of the ‘*Second Track*’ process<sup>1</sup>.

The Dialogue featured presentations by three Australian entrepreneurs: **Dr Anna Wright**, founder of BindiMaps – a smart cities technology start-up developing navigation apps for people with visual impairments; **Julie Gibson**, co-founder of Hitnet – a company that specialises in community information solutions for some of Australia’s harder-to-reach communities; and **Kalolaine Fainu**, founder of Pasifika Film Fest – a film festival that aims to provide opportunities for Pacific stories to be seen by more audiences.

In the afternoon session, the facilitators led participants through a brainstorming workshop to identify potential areas for collaboration. Opportunities discussed included:

- Storytelling and digital content – Pacific film distribution in remote areas
- Developing a members-only online platform for the *Pacific Connect* community
- Commercial cooperation around cocoa bean traceability and education – a potential joint project between Lukasco, TraSeable Solutions and Hitnet
- Enabling after-hour services for retail businesses
- Supporting entrepreneurialism that embraces Pacific culture
- Creative education using Indigenous culture in Australia’s education system

- Building an online retail estate workflow to streamline home-purchasing processes in PNG and tackle contract backlogs
- Developing online payment gateways to enable money transfers for small business
- Educating people about the Pacific through compelling stories and content about its produce
- Exploring the use of drones and barges for development in PNG and the Solomon Islands through collaboration between QUT, Soli Drone Services and Lukasco
- Empowering Pacific entrepreneurs through business management training, workshops and coaching in future *Pacific Connect* Dialogues (James Cook University)
- Educating Pacific businesses about the power of online social media platforms such as Instagram to tell their story and find new customers

Participants agreed to take the following projects for immediate action, while recognising the value of other ideas:

- *Mobile Cinema* – enabling Pacific film distribution in remote Pacific communities, building on the Pasifika Film Fest’s experience, QUT’s technological expertise, and Global Access Partners’ network
- *Digital Farmer* – educating Pacific farmers about technology and digital solutions
- *Payment Gateway* – developing an online payment capability for Pacific businesses, based on Fiji Finds’ model
- *The Network* – building a members-only online platform for *Pacific Connect* alumni to share profiles, contact information and areas of interests by extending the functionality of the existing Slack group and ICDP’s website.

The time participants spent together saw them establish personal connections and mutual understanding, building a strong foundation for future collaborations. Participants shared their ideas and experiences, built rapport and established common purpose. Feedback from participants revealed an overwhelmingly positive response to the Dialogue’s goals, format and outcomes.

## Extra-Curricular Activities

A range of extra-curricular activities for Pacific guests were organised by ICDP during the Dialogue, including a visit to Queensland’s most prominent innovation and start-up hub, **The Precinct**. The Dialogue concluded with a guided tour of the *Women’s Wealth* exhibition, which forms part of the 9<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery – Gallery of Modern Art.<sup>2</sup>. The tour was led by **Ruth McDougall**, Curator of Pacific Art at QAGOMA.

## Social Media Promotion

The *Pacific Women Entrepreneurs - Technology Influencers* Dialogue was extensively promoted online through ICDP's social media channels, blogposts and the *Pacific Connect* NewsWrap. During the event, ICDP featured frequent Dialogue updates on Facebook and LinkedIn, along with live updates on Twitter under the Chatham House rule. Drawing on the success of the previous *Pacific Women in Business and Digital Delivery* Dialogue, participants were encouraged to follow and add to the conversation by using the hashtags #DigitalPacific, #PacificConnect and #PacificWomenInBusiness.

Promotional results were strong, with an ever-increasing number of *Pacific Connect* Community members choosing to continue the conversation on ICDP's social networking platforms. Dialogue tweets generated 3,686 individual impressions throughout the event. ICDP's Dialogue updates on Facebook reached 5,123 people, and LinkedIn updates were seen by 2,205 people. One post – a summary of the agreed projects featuring the Dialogue participants' group photo – attracted 666 engagements and reached 3,900 people on Facebook alone.

ICDP's *Pacific Connect* Community Slack workspace will continue to foster collaboration between Dialogue members to develop networks and group projects. At the time of writing this report, the second Brisbane Dialogue Slack group had 25 members. A members-only Facebook group has been created to respond to the participants' desire to stay connected, as it is often difficult to access Slack workspaces in the Pacific due to technological issues, whereas Facebook has relatively easy access.

Responding to participant feedback, ICDP aims to implement a new, members-only *Pacific Connect* Community portal. More than 400 alumni will be provided with personalised accounts which will enable access to other members' contact details, biographies and project updates, and more effective online networking assisted by a filtering system (interest, project, country, etc.). This initiative is currently in a research phase, and Community alumni will have the opportunity to trial the service and provide feedback before launch in the coming months.

## Participants

### Facilitators

- Zha Agabe-Granfar, Executive Director, Verge Limited, PNG
- Michael Collins, Partner, Strategic Development Group, Australia
- Catherine Fritz-Kalish, Director, ICDP, Co-Founder & Managing Director, Global Access Partners (GAP), Australia

### Pacific Participants

- Pauline Benson, Founding Director, Fiji Finds
- Mele Filiai, Ministry of Finance, Tonga Government
- Rebekah Ilave, Strategic Vision, Operations, Niunet PNG Limited
- Lucy Kasimwane, Founder & Managing Director, Lukasco Group, Solomon Islands
- Shaunalee Katafono, TraSeable Solutions, Fiji
- Bonnie Naua, Owner & Director, Saroni Tailoring Services, PNG
- Alexia Rae, Foreign Investor, Sole Trader, Samoa
- Swaran Ravindra, Senior Instructor, National Training & Productivity Centre, Fiji National University
- Sophia-Joy Soli, Co-Founder, Soli Drone Services, PNG
- Salote Waqairatu, Co-Founder, Landscaping Solutions, Fiji
- Martina Yauieb, Owner & Managing Director, Global Real Estate & Facilities Management, PNG
- Ruha Fifita, Co-Founder, ON THE SPOT Arts Initiative, Tonga

### Australian Participants

- Dr Anna Blackman, Associate Professor & Associate Dean, Research College of Business Law & Governance, James Cook University
- Kylie Ellwood, Trainer & Consultant, Designer Mindset
- Kalolaine Fainu, Founder & Director, Pasifika Film Fest
- Julie Gibson, Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Hitnet
- Taylor Hawkins, Business Advisor, Strategic Consultant; Founder, Linq Advisory
- Joanne Kenny, Lecturer, QUT
- Dr Juliana McLaughlin, Senior Lecturer, QUT
- Dr Anna Wright, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, BindiMaps
- Sheida Vazir-Zadeh, Board Member, Queensland Training Institute

### Dinner Guests

- Trisha Collins, Communications & Marketing, Strategic Development Group
- Dr Ruari Elkington, Lecturer, Creative Industries, QUT

- Kathy Jaeger, Co-President, Pasifika Women's Alliance
- Tate Maen-Wickham, Secretary, Pacific Islands Council of Queensland Inc
- Ysabelle Mellam, Board Member, Pasifika Women's Alliance
- Stella Miria Robinson, President, Kairuku Community PNG
- Ema Vueti, President, Pacific Islands Council of Queensland Inc

## ICDP

- Benjamin Blackshaw, Social Media Manager & Website Editor, ICDP
- Olga Bodrova, ICDP Editorial Team Member, Chief Operating Officer & Director of Research, GAP, Co-Founder, Writing Partners
- Tina Briggs, Program Manager, ICDP
- Simone Pensko, Chief Executive Officer, ICDP



## Proceedings

### Welcome & Introduction

Participants from across the Pacific and Australia were welcomed to the Dialogue, and facilitator **Zha Agabe-Granfar** offered a traditional Pacific welcome.

The voices of Pacific women are not always heard in patriarchal communities, but *Pacific Connect* Dialogues run by ICDP offer a safe space for women to share their stories and experiences. The first Brisbane Dialogue, held in February 2019, allowed participants to expand their personal and professional networks, and it was hoped that the June Dialogue would open further opportunities for project collaboration.



The Dialogue's host and co-facilitator **Catherine Fritz-Kalish** outlined the order of the day. The Dialogue would include presentations, a brainstorming session and the identification of projects to progress. She emphasised that contributions would be noted under the Chatham House Rule of non-attribution to encourage free debate.



ICDP's Chief Executive Officer, **Simone Pensko**, outlined the creation of ICDP and its role and goals in forging enduring relationships between Australia and the Pacific. ICDP manages the Australian Government's *Pacific Connect* programme which grew from an idea that emerged in discussions of one of Global Access Partners' public policy advisories. *Pacific Connect* helps cement enduring relationships between Australians and emerging Pacific leaders through technology projects.

Each ICDP Dialogue gives participants 48 hours to discuss ideas around a particular topic, make new friends and expand their networks. Other topics and venues have included education in the Solomon Islands, labour mobility in Vanuatu and a forthcoming event in Fiji on assistive technology. Practical business projects are the catalyst for relationships to form and endure, and the *Second Track* offers an informal, unofficial way for people to interact as individuals, rather than organisational representatives.

Several projects have already emerged from ICDP Dialogues. The Solomon Islands Education Dialogue in November 2018 suggested an online database for infrastructure to turn any building into a classroom, a project that won \$50,000 in funding in April 2019. The World Economic Forum's Global Shapers will create a new hub for Pacific leaders under 35, which will be based in Samoa. Such initiatives highlight what collaboration can achieve.

Participants were invited to introduce themselves from a family perspective. While they hailed from different countries, they shared common traits of creativity, honesty, fortitude, and a willingness to venture 'beyond the reef'.

## Presentations

### **Dr Anna Wright Founder & Chief Executive Officer, BindiMaps**



BindiMaps is an award-winning smart cities technology start-up whose smartphone app allows visually impaired people to independently navigate unfamiliar indoor environments. The app uses vocal instructions, which can be delivered through bone-conducting headphones, with a positional precision of 50cm. Demonstration videos are available on YouTube.

An initial private investment of \$100,000 and a \$25,000 grant from the NSW Government funded a proof of concept, which was piloted successfully with Vision Australia and Guide Dogs New South Wales. One million dollars in seed funding from an initial venture capital round has since funded premises and developers. The app was successfully released in March 2019 on the Apple App Store. It is free to users and is paid for by building owners to increase accessibility of their premises. BindiMaps has enough funds to trade until December 2019, by which time it will need sustainable sales or further investment to survive.

It was a struggle to convince corporate Australia executives that blind people exist and are a viable market, but statistics show that one person in 42 is visually impaired, even after wearing glasses. Many visually impaired people have not used similar technology before, but BindiMaps trials in complicated areas such as shopping centres and a Royal Society for the Blind event in Adelaide have proved liberating for this cohort.

The inspiration for the app came from the founder's personal experience of visual impairment and her need to navigate university buildings. Educational institutions may also form the app's initial user base. Only one in five visually impaired Australians complete tertiary education, with fewer still in the Pacific, but technology such as screen readers and voice-overs can help them receive education, secure a job and contribute to society. People who have been blind since birth can 'feel' the proximity of a wall, recognise voices and have excellent problem-solving skills, and these natural attributes can be enhanced by technology.

Rather than shaming sceptics into supporting ideas for marginalised or disadvantaged groups, giving information and asking questions encourages engagement with the problem and its solutions. Collaboration with like-minded people is a key to success, as is learning from their feedback. People with visual impairment may also have other physical and cognitive issues, for example, which the app might help ameliorate.

**Julie Gibson**  
**Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Hitnet**

Emerging female entrepreneurs can help disrupt male-dominated traditions in the Pacific and Australia.

Hitnet is a community co-creation platform which delivers technological solutions to social problems. It brings information and services to isolated communities, as the rapid pace of digital transformation means that people need to go online to get help, rather than visit a physical location.



Hitnet were incubated within a university research department where they developed their unique products and services with various rounds of government funding. This enabled them to scale nationally around Australia with the first iteration of their hardware, and this eventually enabled them to launch a business that had a small customer base and a basic product.

Hitnet helps build vibrant, healthy, digitally capable communities around the world, and has proved successful in Indigenous communities in Australia. Over 750,000 Australians have an Indigenous background, but they tend to have poor health outcomes, living 15 years less than average. The Australian Government's *Closing the Gap* campaign works to improve Indigenous health, but it has proved a complex issue.

Digital commerce and technology play an increasingly central and empowering role in people's lives, and so people who are not online are socially excluded. Three million Australians still do not use the internet, through lack of finance, access or digital literacy, while another 3-4 million struggle to use it in their daily lives for a variety of reasons. People in Indigenous communities may have no digital devices, no Wi-Fi access or limited data, while those in urban areas may have low digital literacy and find it difficult to navigate government sites. Australia's National Broadband Network serves metropolitan areas well, but connectivity remains poor in some regions.

Hitnet connects, informs and engages communities by setting up indoor hubs and free Wi-Fi hotspots for mobile devices in remote, regional and urban locations. Many of these are situated in health centres, youth centres, schools and libraries. A rechargeable, transportable outdoor hub has also been developed, funded by reinvested profits, to take touch-screen information into the community.

As well as a user-friendly digital 'landing page' to offer easy access to the internet, Hitnet has co-created 50 digital hubs in regional Australia with local communities. These offer health, social and cultural information on touch screens in audio and video formats, covering financial literacy, job readiness, consumer rights, government services and health information on difficult subjects such as mental and sexual health. These 'one stop shops' are co-designed with communities to address their needs, as every organisation and business should listen to its customers to tailor and improve its services. Hitnet continues to iterate, as well as innovate.

Hitnet was a winner of DFAT's 2019 Technology for Development Challenge and will now use its *Mobile Max* outdoor hub as an 'on-ramp' for young women to the new digital economy in the Solomon Islands. Hitnet has only four staff members, and is partnering with Field Ready, an international non-government organisation, to develop solar-powered technology, and a Solomons-based consultancy to produce content and liaise with the community. These hubs should create a range of jobs and commercial activity beyond the 12-month scope of the initial project.

Hitnet's co-founder Julie Gibson calls herself an 'accidental entrepreneur' who began her career as a software engineer. Mentors can help budding entrepreneurs develop their skills, while co-working spaces offer a cost-effective alternative to self-owned premises. Several female-centred networks exist to help women thrive in the male-dominated worlds of technology and business.

Prospective business owners should always listen to their customers and understand the problems they are trying to solve. They must continually improve their products and services and pursue partnerships and collaboration to develop scale. Above all, entrepreneurs must be passionate about what they do, be prepared to work hard without immediate reward, and have a long-term vision for the future.

People with an idea need to identify suppliers and partners to turn it into a reality, and *Pacific Connect* events can offer a catalyst for this to happen.

## Brainstorming Session Opportunities for Women Using Technology in the Pacific

### Facilitator – Zha Agabe-Granfar

This one-hour ‘speed meeting’ session allowed participants to meet each other, share professional details and broaden their networks. Non-technology specialists were encouraged to interact with experts to help develop their ideas for commercial or non-profit projects for Pacific communities.



At the end of the session, participants were encouraged to continue their discussions over lunch and reflect on new opportunities for collaboration, as well as getting help for their existing projects. While a list of potential projects and prospective businesses will be prepared later in the Dialogue, participants were also asked to look for other ways to network and pursue mutually beneficial endeavours.

Participants agreed the session had been both useful and enjoyable, and was a feature missing from most other conferences. Previous *Pacific Connect* Dialogues have produced high-level ideas, but the key to success is defining specific activities and people committing to undertake them. The ‘speed meeting’ session helps create the personal contacts which can link personal networks to find required expertise.

## Planning Session

### Exploring Opportunities Across the Pacific: Sharing Ideas and Identifying Opportunities for Collaboration

#### Facilitator – Michael Collins

The Strategic Development Group is a consulting company which works with GAP and ICDP to deliver *Pacific Connect* activities. This planning session prompted participants' ideas for collaboration on community and business projects in more detail. Participants were asked to produce concepts for joint endeavours, decide who might collaborate on them, and concentrate on their possibilities rather than restraints. The projects did not have to include every member, or be virtual in nature, but should promote participants' self-interest to ensure their commitment.



Participants suggested the following 13 ideas:

- **Film distribution to remote areas**

Julie Gibson of Hitnet could work with Niunet in PNG to distribute Kalolaine Fainu's new short film to remote communities in PNG.

- **Members-only *Pacific Connect* database**

A password-protected database on the ICDP website could allow every member of the *Pacific Connect* Community to post their biographies and note projects they are working on or wish to develop. This would allow other members to contact them at any time regarding new or existing projects and encourage ongoing engagement beyond social media interaction.

- **Traceability and education in agriculture**

Hitnet, Lucasco and the TraSeable Farms platform could work together to trace produce from cocoa farms and other agricultural sectors and improve farmers' digital education.

- **Compelling content for remote business communities**

Participants could collaborate to generate high-quality advertising content for Solomon Islands cocoa and other Pacific goods to increase their visibility online and offer their producers a voice.

- **After-hours services in Tonga**

Retailers and businesses in Tonga tend to shut at 5pm, but still see customers arriving late. A new platform could organise students willing to work after school to provide longer opening hours at reasonable cost.

- **Culturally sensitive entrepreneurship**

A project could offer young Pacific Island entrepreneurs services and support which combine Pacific culture with Western business techniques. This could cover art, education, business and marketing, as well as ways to make connections.

- **Creative education through indigenous culture**

The *GAP Vision for Australia* Annual Summit on education in September 2019 will discuss ways to inject creativity into the Australian education system. The vitality of indigenous culture should be tapped to revitalise standard education.

- **Online real estate administration**

An online real estate workflow in PNG would help home buyers reduce the 4-5 month delays they face between signing a contract and moving into their new home to just two weeks. It would reduce paperwork delays by giving the home buyer a signed electronic contract which the legal conveyancer and other stakeholders could access. PNG has seen a boom in home purchases over the last five years, but delays are hampering housing developers and banks, as well as buyers. This project would require a coder and a cyber security specialist.

- **Online payment gateways**

Small businesses need ways to transfer money for e-commerce in Samoa, Fiji, PNG and other Pacific nations. The World Economic Forum and United Nations' reports highlight the need for a scalable solution, such as creating a commercial company or not-for profit for Pacific companies to channel payments through. WordPress sites in Australia can accept payment through a plug-in and be paid in Australian dollars to their Australian bank account, but small firms in PNG, Samoa and Fiji cannot receive local currency in a local bank account, which hampers their attempts at international trade.

Fiji Finds offers an online shop for domestic producers to sell their products internationally, and similar solutions are required in other nations. Small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in PNG and similar nations can solve this issue by creating an offshore company, but the authorities are aware they need a better solution. Unfortunately, official reforms are slow, and a solution for money transfers remain a core challenge across the region.

- **Storytelling to promote products and services**

SMEs can advertise their products online by promoting the “stories” behind them and their makers. This approach could link with the traceable agricultural produce idea, or borrow from the ways in which Australian Indigenous goods are authenticated, to capture, conserve and popularise Pacific culture. Australian consumers value authentic indigenous goods, and this could allow Pacific producers to charge a premium.

- **Drones and barges for development**

A collaboration between QUT and Soli Drone Services in PNG could see large drones used to monitor agricultural land changes. Drones are cheaper than helicopters and more economic for sustained local operations. Their use could be extended to other Pacific Island nations to survey sea level rises caused by climate change. QUT could also partner with Lucasco in the Solomon Islands to help develop reef-capable boats to eliminate the need to transfer goods from ships to dinghies for landing onshore.

- **Empowering remote entrepreneurs through management training**

As noted at the recent Solomon Islands Dialogue, entrepreneurs in rural and remote communities can require additional training, coaching and mentoring. A platform to link female entrepreneurs to advice and staff training could utilise *Pacific Connect* alumni and other experts, while James Cook University could provide workshops and coaching.

- **Instagram stories**

Entrepreneurs and SMEs can use Instagram to build communities and raise issues as well as advertise their products. Instagram is a popular, free and powerful social media platform, and its users need only have a smartphone camera and internet connection to make an impact across the world.

These ideas were then grouped under four headings for further consideration:

1. **Remote engagement** could involve the film distribution, commercial cooperation in agriculture, and information sharing projects.
2. **Payment gateways** would help small firms across the Pacific engage in international online trade.
3. **Storytelling and digital content** on Instagram would advertise these products more effectively, while tracing their origins would ensure their authenticity.
4. **Networking and training for entrepreneurs** could support many of the projects suggested in the discussion. Linking local business support schemes in Pacific Island nations to share stories, information and resources through *Pacific Connect* and the ICDP website would be valuable. Aggregating more information with the support of local universities and non-government organisations would educate the rest of the world about the Pacific and its culture.

These four themes could also be depicted through circles which map the needs of budding entrepreneurs and established SMEs to culture, storytelling and marketing.

Participants split themselves into four groups to discuss these themes, identify specific projects and allocate roles.

## Group Feedback & Project Conceptualisation

**Facilitators – Catherine Fritz-Kalish, Zha Agabe-Granfar, Michal Collins**

The four groups presented their ideas in turn.

### 1. Remote Engagement Group

This group called its project *The Digital Farmer*. It encompassed a number of issues, including farming in remote areas and the growing issue of food security. Rather than attempt to impose cutting edge ideas and new technology on traditional farmers, it should build on their legacy of experience and local knowledge. Farmers across the region are “very territorial” about their practices, and initial discussion of gadgets could intimidate or antagonise them.

A more subtle approach to gain farmers' confidence would see them interviewed for documentary videos which would act as SCOT analysis to reveal their strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats. This could lead to the development of content addressing technology, education and digital and financial literacy, and, once farmers are fully engaged, to the introduction of new approaches, including blockchain and agriculture 4.0.



The project should set realistic, measurable goals with clear timelines. It should mobilise existing resources and adapt best practice from across the region to local conditions. It might initially run for 18 months. A project leader will be identified to liaise with ICDP.

A similar idea was raised in the PNG Dialogue, and the Elders Smart Farmer App<sup>3</sup>, which shows agricultural trends and weather conditions, was recommended for consideration.

## 2. Payment Gateway Group

This project will build on Fiji Finds to extend online transactions to SMEs across the region. SMEs can be reluctant to share information about themselves and their products online, so a template could be offered to standardise this information. This could include photographs and 'stories' produced by other participants at the Dialogue.

Regulatory and banking barriers prevent commonly used gateways such as PayPal from operating in the Pacific, although Westpac recently started to accept payments in PNG from overseas. SMEs face bureaucratic problems in setting up a business bank account, and lack resources and expertise required to set up or maintain their own website and payment system. A proven, ready-to-use platform such as Fiji Finds would help them trade online and build their profile.

### 3. Storytelling and Digital Content Group

This group suggested showing films featured in the Pasifika Film Fest in Pacific Island nations. The festival began in Sydney in 2013 and has since expanded to other Australian cities, as well as Auckland and Wellington in New Zealand. It shows films about Pacific people, culture, social issues, but their makers are rarely able to share their work in their own communities.

This project would need partnerships between festival organisers and hosts in each country. Borrowing from Hitnet's *Mobile Max* idea, a mobile cinema, including a screen and projector, could be transported in a small shipping container on the back of a ute, or a boat to travel up river. Screenings might be powered by solar cells in remote areas without mains electricity.

Film storytelling can raise issues in remote regions which are usually the preserve of metropolitan inhabitants. The project could be progressed by members identifying relevant people in their networks of contacts. A university such as QUT could help design the mobile cinema.



Group members could produce a single page flyer, and seek professional advice to get support, perhaps through crowdfunding as well as public grants.

### 4. Networked and Training for Entrepreneurs Group



The final group offered itself as an umbrella over the three other areas in terms of communication and contacts. Each Dialogue already has a Slack community for personal communication, project development and file sharing, but the creation of a searchable database of all alumni, including contact details, project interests and professional attributes, would enable broader collaboration and offer further network opportunities. While people enthusiastically engage in a Dialogue, their busy lives can limit their long-term commitment to projects discussed there. A standing database would allow them to get involved at a later date or with other projects.

Having contactable alumni in host nations could also create opportunities to run seminars or short courses in conjunction with future Dialogues. These could offer practical help and advice on particular topics to female entrepreneurs, for example. Short videos or webinars might also be produced to show online. This material should be produced by people from the nation involved to offer a cultural context, as well as Australian expertise.

## Summary of Dialogue Outcomes & Next Steps

### Facilitator – Catherine Fritz-Kalish

The four projects and their contacts are:

- **Mobile Cinema** – Kalolaine Fainu, Pasifika Film Fest
- **Digital Farmer** – Swaran Ravindra, Fiji National University
- **Payment Gateway** – Pauline Benson, Fiji Finds
- **The Network** – Dr Anna Blackman, James Cook University

The network concept is directly related to ICDP's mission to build ongoing networks which persist beyond particular meetings. GAP established *First 5000*<sup>4</sup>, an online site for mid-sized firms, which could perhaps host space for collaboration by ICDP alumni.

The Dialogue has allowed participants to make friends as well as learn about each other on professional and personal level. Further discussions can be held face to face and online through the ICDP Slack channel. Participants agreed the Dialogue had been empowering and enlightening, allowing them to share their stories, reinforce belief in their businesses and give back to their communities.

While the suggested projects have been amalgamated into four themes, participants can still collaborate on other goals and should keep ICDP informed on their progress. Slack offers a platform to continue collaboration, share documents and develop projects. Participants also communicate through WhatsApp. Slack could also host a database of *Pacific Connect* alumni.

Participants were asked to give feedback on the Dialogue by completing a short online survey designed by the University of Technology, Sydney. They were also encouraged to submit blogs for publication on the ICDP website.

Speakers, ICDP staff and participants were praised for their enthusiasm and commitment, DFAT was thanked for its financial support, and QLD Parliament House was thanked for hosting the Dialogue.

## Dinner Keynote Address

Addressing the Dialogue participants and guests at the networking dinner on 17 June, **Kalolaine Fainu** outlined her experiences in creating the Pasifika Film Fest<sup>5</sup>, an annual event which builds regional identity and represents the diverse peoples of the Pacific by screening films made by Pacific Islanders.

Kalolaine argued that people often limit their own abilities and that entrepreneurship is an acquired skill which can be developed over time. She remembered the first digital camera arriving on campus while she completed her degree in photography at Brisbane College of Arts and said her subsequent masters in Media Arts and Production had led her to make collaborative short films with local people in Pacific communities. She founded the film festival with the only other Pacific woman on her film course, with a \$3,000 community grant, and the first event was held in a warehouse in Marrickville in 2013.

The Pasifika Film Festival has since been held in 2015, 2016 and 2018. It is run by volunteers and has expanded to screen films in major cinemas in state capitals across Australia and New Zealand. As cinemas grew larger, however, the volunteers running the event found they were losing contact with Pacific communities and realised that 'bigger and brighter' is not always better.

The festival has created opportunities to engage with broader Pacific communities, offering a point of difference to other festivals. A documentary screening about a female tattooist from PNG included a live tattooing demonstration, for example, and a dance exhibition accompanied another film. A 48-hour film challenge in 2018 saw young film makers take workshops in Sydney before creating their own short films which were immediately screened at the festival. Kalolaine said in the future she hoped to screen films in the Pacific as well.

The festival has been difficult to sustain, given the pressure it puts on volunteers with limited time. Kalolaine also runs a small fitness franchise in Paramatta, and while that business has sapped her energy, it has helped raise health awareness in Western Sydney, although it still lags behind the Eastern Suburbs.

She recalled the influence of her late grandmother and outlined her intention to make a short film about returning to PNG to inter her grandparents' ashes. She recently completed a project on powerful and inspiring women with a Pacific dance and arts group in Sydney, and stressed the power of storytelling and collaboration to bring young people together.

Kalolaine closed with a quote by anthropologist Margaret Mead which stressed the powerful results of melding European influence and Polynesian culture. She urged participants to consider their legacy in all their activities and to incorporate traditional indigenous culture and technology as well as modern high-tech devices in their projects. She was then praised for her inspiring address, and the Dialogue organisers were thanked for their efforts.



## Feedback

Following the Dialogue, all participants were asked to complete a Post-Dialogue survey administered by the University of Technology Sydney. Out of **21 emerging leaders who participated** in the Dialogue, **17 completed** the survey. In addition to the survey, participants were also invited to be part of a 20-minute telephone interview to discuss specific topics in more detail. **Four participants** were interviewed, and their views and opinions are included in the attached Dialogue Findings Report.

The key findings from the Brisbane Dialogue are outlined below.

- The survey found that for the majority of participants the Brisbane Dialogue was the first event associated with *Pacific Connect* they participated in.
- Most responders agreed that the program is able to strengthen connections, build relationships and contribute to economic development and good governance in the Pacific.
- A majority of respondents (14 mentions) agreed that the Dialogue was useful and helpful to their work in the future. Almost all participants (15 mentions) agreed that it helped them expand their contacts and networks, and believe that future joint projects will emerge as a result of their involvement, and that they are more committed to collaboration with Pacific and Australian leaders as a result of the Dialogue. Each of the four participants that took part in the telephone interview mentioned they were very satisfied or highly satisfied with the contacts and networking opportunities they developed and hoped that those would continue to grow. Survey respondents saw an opportunity to expand their contacts and networks, the role of ICT as a development tool, and the diversity of participant's backgrounds as key strengths of the Dialogue.
- The 'speed meeting' activity was mentioned as a valuable exercise in meeting and brainstorming potential collaboration ideas with other participants.
- Following the Dialogue, there was a significant number of participants joining the *Pacific Connect* Slack Group, visiting the ICDP website and following the ICDP LinkedIn and Facebook pages. Five participants established a business relationship with one of their new contacts, and three contracted at least one of their contacts' services. A proposal to develop an online payment and transaction gateway was also workshopped.
- Moving forward, participants would like ICDP to continue developing *Pacific Connect* Community alumni as an opportunity for members to remain in contact and share experiences and projects. A central resource with access to the alumni's 'bio catalogue' was seen by many as a useful networking and collaboration tool.

## Continued Collaboration

### Slack Group & Brisbane Dialogue

Participants were linked post-Dialogue via a dedicated *Pacific Connect* Slack online channel, where they also have access to the broader *Pacific Connect* Community. This platform is designed for working in teams on the project proposals through sharing documents, having specific conversations and exploring ideas.

Several Pacific-based and Australian Dialogue participants will have the opportunity to connect and discuss projects at the upcoming Dialogues in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji.



## Testimonials and Blogposts

- *“Thank you for the invitation to attend the Brisbane dinner. I am excited about being part of this Dialogue. These dinner invitations have been very useful for diaspora Pacific communities and members to connect and network with participants from the region. As a result of the invitations (June dinner), a community member in Brisbane was asked by a participant to mentor her. I believe that this initiative could develop into a sustainable program where partnerships with diaspora women's groups and reciprocal groups in the region may be developed around the Pacific Connect themes.” – An Australian participant*
- *“Sophia was in Brisbane to attend the Pacific Connect Women Entrepreneurs - Technology Influencers Dialogue. Other participating countries included, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Australia. Sophia met a lecturer and industry advisor from the School of Creative Practice, Queensland University of Technology. We are excited to be in touch with QUT experts who have a passion for innovation in film, aerial robotics and automation.” – a PNG participant*
- *“The opportunity to grow our connections and network is invaluable. [...] It was definitely a very enjoyable and mind-buzzing trip, the ideas, themes, networking and potential partnerships and projects were indeed so encouraging. [...] Thanks very much for everything, it was an awesome dialogue and it really exceeded my expectations, my minds buzzing :) ... the ICDP team and facilitators were awesome... I am really glad I had a chance to be a part of all of this!” – A Fijian participant*
- *“Thank you for your hard work which ensured a successful dialogue around Pacific Women Entrepreneurs – Technology Influencers here in Brisbane. I can appreciate all the little things that need to be taken care of, as well as the logistics – big job. It was wonderful to meet young women with so much to offer. I have already made contact with some of the participants, and I look forward to collaborating with them in the future. I have sent links and information to assist and inspire them. Due to my close and passionate relationship with PNG I am developing some projects in PNG which align with some of the participant's activities - so thank you to you and your team for connecting us.” – an Australian participant*
- *“It has truly been a wonderful experience indeed for me to be invited to participate in this dialogue. Although I did not complete the program, the time together on Tuesday was invigorating, meeting likeminded and impactful women across the Pacific sharing experiences, insights, exchanging contacts and making connections. I just loved the energy in the dialogue room. What novel and moving stories from Anna and Julie. Thank you for bringing these two exceptional women to us who have blessed me with their story of persistence. I am so, so deeply grateful to all the powerful women behind ICDP.” – a PNG participant*

- **“What can we all do together that we can’t do apart?”** by Julie Gibson  
<https://www.icdp.com.au/2019/07/12/what-can-we-all-do-together-that-we-cant-do-apart/>

*I was very pleased to be approached by the International Centre for Democratic Partnerships (ICDP) to present at their Pacific Connect Dialogue for Pacific Women Entrepreneurs and Technology Influencers. This opportunity ticked a number of boxes for me personally, and also for my business Hitnet.*

*There were around twenty women from five different Pacific Island Nations and a group of businesswomen from Australia, in attendance. The spirit of everyone attending the Dialogue was ‘what can we all do together that we can’t do apart?’ and it followed a ‘Second Track Process’ that was new to me. This brings a multidisciplinary group of people together, building long-term relationships between dialogue members and encourages people to engage in a personal capacity rather than only representing their organisation. It’s a two-phase process and focuses on implementation of solutions. While phase one is about identifying solutions, phase two is about making sure those recommendations have impact in the real world.*

*With this framework in mind, it was lovely to get to know and spend time with this wonderful group of women who are all running their businesses often under very difficult conditions. Access to funding, reliable internet connectivity and the ability to use local (rather than overseas-based) payment gateways for e-commerce, were some pain points identified.*

*I was really pleased to be able to talk about my journey as a female technology entrepreneur, starting off as a software developer, as we are all operating in a male dominated environment. I suggested connecting with women’s networks for support as we are fortunate in Australia to have a number, such as SBE Australia and SheEO. The Pacific Connect Dialogue for Pacific Women Entrepreneurs is also now a great opportunity to be a part of such a network where we can encourage and support each other. I also talked about the power of mentors and my advisory board, as well as being part of a co-working space.*

*There was much interest when I talked about Hitnet’s latest innovation, Mobile Max, delivering information and services to hard to reach communities. This outdoor digital hub with WiFi hotspot runs off a battery and can be wheeled to where people want to use him. Mobile Max is the basis for our ‘technology for development’ challenge project in the Solomon Islands. We were recent winners of this challenge set by DFAT to leverage off the installation of the Coral Sea Cable project, bringing high speed internet to Pacific Island nations for the first time. In the Solomons we will be developing Max to be solar powered so he can go ‘off grid’ and so serve even harder to reach communities with educational and job-related information and services. The use of technology to deliver information and services into remote areas, was an ongoing theme in discussions at the Dialogue.*

*After much discussion and brainstorming of how our businesses could work together, our ideas were categorised into four themes and we formed teams to potentially hatch into a project. Our wonderful team of seven were from Tonga, Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Australia. We also had diversity of age and experience to throw into the mix, and we worked collaboratively to explore a project around 'remote engagement'. What we eventually decided on; we nicknamed the 'Digital Farmer'. The problem for farmers is that they are 'set in their ways' and have a negative attitude to the digital world, how can we break down these barriers and get them to use tools to improve productivity and their livelihoods? In the Solomon Islands, farmers lack information about markets and production, and have low levels of financial literacy. This would be a storytelling project to show the challenges of being a farmer and then showcase the benefits of the digital world, potentially having impact in the real world. Our team of seven is now set and we have re-connected now that we are back to our five different home countries.*

*From my networking discussions, I found synergies with the work of Rebekah Ilave at Niunet PNG who is just beginning her edtech business, and the inspirational Kalo Fainu who founded the Pasifika Film Festival, and is now producing a film about her ancestry and wants to be able to deliver it back to remote parts of PNG with a mobile cinema or perhaps a Mobile Max? We will stay connected and continue to nurture these supportive friendships and partnerships.*

## Endnotes

- 1 The *'Second Track'* is an innovative process of group collaboration focusing on positive thinking, deep long-term engagement, and a strong personal interest in achieving practical results.
- 2 <https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/whats-on/exhibitions/the-9th-asia-pacific-triennial-of-contemporary-art-apt9/artists/womens-wealth>
- 3 <https://eldersrural.com.au/about-us/elders-smart-farmer-app/>
- 4 <https://www.first5000.com.au>
- 5 <https://www.pasifikafilmfest.com/>